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A GRAND DUKE OF RUSSIA

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A STORY OF THE UPHEAVAL

BY

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A MAN stood upon the quay of Cronstadt Mole and watched a boat-load of drunken Russian sailors being towed from shore to shipboard by a second boat, manned by a crew presumably sober. In the 'drunken' boat there sat, in the midst of his semi-torpid companions, an officer armed with a long boat-hook. Whenever one of the unfortunate inebriates attempted to raise himself from the bottom of the vessel, where he lay with his fellows in extreme discomfort, the officer brought the long staff down upon his head or shoulder, causing him to sink back with a groan or a muttered curse.

The thing seemed to the watcher to be an allegory which those who run might read.

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A GRAND DUKE OF RUSSIA

A STORY OF THE UPHEAVAL

CHAPTER I

A MARRIAGE in humble life, though not the very humblest, had taken place this day in the village of Karapsin, twenty miles from St. Petersburg. The bride was one Matrona, only child of the village priest, generally known as Father Gavril; known also far and wide as a drunken, untrustworthy, degraded specimen of a class which does not enjoy too good a name in Russia, though here and there are many grand fellows whose lives offer a noble contradiction to the questionable reputation of the village 'popes.'

Matrona had cried half the day, partly, no doubt, in deference to the custom in vogue from time immemorial among Russian brides on this most important day of their lives, though some said that she had private and adequate reason for her tears over and above the necessity

of conforming to a practice so time-honoured and so universal.

The bridegroom was one Volodia Pavlof, a youth of extremely attractive appearance, and one for whom any village maiden, one might suppose, would be glad to resign her maidenhood without shedding a single tear over and above those demanded by conventional propriety. Pavlof enjoyed a good position—nothing less than that of chief keeper upon a great shooting estate belonging to his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Maximilian Petrovitch, who was first cousin once removed to the throne itself. Pavlof was somewhat young to have attained so excellent a position, but he enjoyed the favour of his Imperial Highness by virtue of his parents, in the first instance. For the lad's mother had been the extremely pretty daughter of a gardener of the Grand Duke, for whom a husband had been found at a psychological moment in the person of Ivan Pavlof, lodge-keeper at his Highness's country seat at Biéloy, close to this village of Karapsin.

Volodia Pavlof was devoted to his profession of game-preserving and hunting, for it was his duty to provide the Grand Duke's establishment with game, as well as to see that the

place was free of poachers ; but he had found time to look favourably upon, if not actually to fall in love with, Matrona, the priest's daughter, and to gain very quickly and decidedly the favour of her parents. Father Gavril lost no time in convincing the girl that whatsoever might be her own private ideas upon the subject, these would not be reckoned as of any consequence whatever, for she must certainly marry Pavlof, who was in a manner the protégé of his Imperial Highness and sure to get on in the world. He was, besides, an extremely amiable, excellent, and attractive young man, and worth a dozen of such idiots as—at this point Matrona had burst into tears and cried for half a day, just as she had cried for half this, her wedding day.

The wedding was not a very gay one, for many of the young fellows belonging to the village had left for Manchuria but a week or two before, and most of the maidens were dull and pensive in consequence. The priest was drunk nearly all day, having begun to prepare himself at early morn for the anguish of parting with his daughter. Two aunts of Matrona were staying in the house, and these ladies were conventionally tearful and perfectly happy. They found occasion to warn Matrona

that she was overdoing the crying; 'What will people think?' they asked her. 'A certain show of modesty and regret is correct and proper, but you are crying as though you suffered actual grief.'

'I don't care what people think,' said Matrona; 'it is the same to me. I cry because I have no reason to laugh.'

'What is the meaning of it?' the old ladies asked, going to Matrona's tired, depressed, care-aged and poverty-worn mother for information. 'Is there a lover?'

The priest's wife crossed herself and muttered a few words towards the *ikon*. 'The Lord knows what He knows,' she replied. 'What I know I do not speak of. What is the use? Matrona is only beginning life. These are baby tears; I pray she may never have better cause for weeping.'

'The bridegroom, Volodia Pavlof, is a beautiful man; he has a good position and sufficient wages.'

'He is good enough; it is not that she weeps for. Let her weep—what does it matter?'

'What is the truth about this young man?' asked the aunts of the old priest; they were strangers in this place, having come merely

for the wedding. 'I heard it whispered that his mother——'

Father Gavril, tipsy but very happy, held up a warning forefinger. 'If you have heard any such foolishness,' he said, 'let it be forgotten. I know what you would have said—it is nonsense, foolishness; moreover, it is dangerous to utter such things.'

The priest spoke with a beaming face; he smiled and even winked his eye.

'Nevertheless, he is a son-in-law to be proud of!' he added.

'It is true what we were told,' said one aunt to the other; 'Holy Saints, what a marriage Matrona is making, and the little fool cries!'

The wedding festivities passed off as gaily as could be expected with a bride consistently tearful, and in view of the fact that half the menfolk had been sent away to the war. A few were left, however, and among these was Vainka Shadrine, who ran the little shop which served the community, providing it with bread, sweets, salted herrings, and printed calicoes. The paternal Government had taken over the sale of vodka, or Shadrine would have had a very much more profitable trade. Vodka could now only be bought by the bottle, and must be drunk outside the shop; hence,

whereas the moujiks were wont to drink themselves tipsy within the dram-shop in a decent and respectable manner, it had now become the custom to buy your bottle and drink it at a draught in the street without, which practice involved the necessity of sleeping off the effects then and there, to the great detriment of traffic and the not inconsiderable danger to the heads and limbs of the unconscious sleepers from cart wheels.

Now when Matrona's eyes met the eyes of this man Shadrine she cried even more heartily than before, which of course told a tale. The priest, her father, was not so tipsy but that he observed this fact, when he angrily bade the girl cease to make a fool of herself. Matrona had nothing to say upon the subject, but—like an obedient Russian daughter—she dried her tears for a few minutes.

The ceremony passed off satisfactorily. It was Shadrine who held the crown over Matrona's head, while the same service was performed for Pavlof by a friend, a young gentleman of the neighbourhood and an old schoolfellow of Pavlof's. For Volodia had been educated at St. Petersburg and well educated, an unusual matter indeed for a youth in his position; but the money had been provided

by an 'unknown friend,' and Pavlof's parents had made no objection.

After the ceremony there was dancing and drinking and wild driving backwards and forwards, up and down the village street, by the whole company. Shadrine danced a great deal with Matrona, and they had much to say to one another.

Volodia, the bridegroom, being a simple-minded person and accustomed to believe that others were much the same, took little notice of all these things. That Matrona should cry with conventional freedom was quite natural and proper; that she should dance with and have a great deal to say to her own 'best man'—an old friend, as he was given to understand, was also quite as it should be.

Afterwards, when they had been duly escorted to their own home and left there by their elated friends, it did somewhat worry Pavlof that his bride should continue to cry and wring her hands.

'You have nothing to fear, Matrona,' he told her, 'I shall be a kind and indulgent husband to you. Why do you weep?'

Matrona cried quietly on and refused to speak.

'Tell me,' he insisted.

'Because I have married a blind man,' sobbed the girl.

'I am not blind—what do you mean? Is there something I might have seen that I did not see?' But Matrona would say nothing.

There had been no love-making as a preliminary to this match. Pavlof had seen the girl once or twice and had approved of her, and that was all; the rest had been arranged between the parents; the bridegroom could scarcely have been expected to know of any little matters such as previous attachments and so forth. Most village bridegrooms would have cared little whether there had or had not existed any such insignificant episodes before marriage; but Volodia was different and Matrona's hints worried him not a little; they did not anger him at all.

He felt an infinite pity, however, for the girl's present sorrow, and the strongest determination that if it should be in his power to make amends to his wife for her ill-fortune in having fallen in love with one man while compelled to marry another, he would amply atone for his share in the matter by making her an excellent and ideal husband.

The marriage was not a great success, however. Pavlof did his best to please his wife, but

Matrona only sulked. The home was uncomfortable. Day by day he found that married life was disappointing. His wife was more than disappointing; at the best she wore an air of long-suffering and resignation, which was trying to her husband, who had looked for brightness and sympathy; at her worst Matrona made no secret of the fact that she looked upon her man as an enemy, against whom she cherished a just grievance. She made no attempt to make the best of matters; Volodia must be punished by possessing a wretched home and by having constantly before his eyes the spectacle of a woman whom by his selfishness and blindness he had condemned to misery.

Sadly Pavlof realised and acknowledged that his home was an unhappy one and that in marrying his wife he had attached to his neck a burden which would keep him head-to-earth instead of chin-in-air, which was the position natural to his disposition.

Of course, he was not long in discovering who was the author of his wife's discontent. If he had not discovered it for himself, the villagers would soon have enlightened him. He did not, however, at this time, blame Shadrine. If his wife happened to fall in love with the fellow before her marriage, he was not to blame for

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that. It was a misfortune, and, of course, Shadrine must beware lest he should be tempted, by virtue of past days, to meddle with matters which no longer concerned him. But so long as Shadrine remained discreet he could not be called to account for ancient history.

CHAPTER II

A DARK night in late March made darker by a dense canopy of snow-laden pine-trees overhead ; a forest in northern Russia, some twenty miles from the capital ; a fire of twigs and dead branches and rotting wood torn from decayed stumps, and two men lying prone upon the ground with their feet to the warmth. Of these, one, stretched luxuriously upon rugs and sheep-skins and covered with a splendid fur mantle or shooba, snored loudly, fast asleep. The other, dressed in a peasant's polshoobka of superior make, and dispensing with either rugs beneath him or mantles above him, lay on his back and watched a patch of star-covered sky, which showed between the tapering tops of two pine-trees overhead. He counted the stars for the twentieth time, and then waited, hummed a melancholy Russian air, and counted them again.

Suddenly, far away, as it seemed, though he knew the exact distance to the open space in mid-forest whence the sound came, there broke

on the silence of the night the wild, merry laugh of the willow-grouse, herald of still distant morn, the first, by a good hour each day, to proclaim the dawn that still tarried.

The watcher sat up and yawned; he took off his fur cap and scratched his head; then he glanced at his companion across the fire.

‘Devil take it!’ he muttered; ‘we ought to be up and about, but what is one to do with an Imperial Highness, if he would sleep on? Sleep he must, and the capercailzies must go hang!—Well, he shall have another half-hour; after that I shall wake him whether he will or no.’

He lay down again and counted his stars for the twenty-second time; he got them one less this time and was obliged to count them over again. The stillness was like the silence of death. The willow-grouse, startled, apparently, by his own boldness, had postponed his uprising and settled down once more, longing to give tongue, maybe, but afraid to break the peace; one of many million atoms in this country, had he known it, that longed to find a voice but dared not; Russia was teeming with such, ready to cry out when God’s good time should arrive.

A thud startled our watcher, murdering the silence. A great mass of snow, loosened by the warmth of the fire beneath, had fallen from the neck of a pine-tree overhead, a yard or two from the feet of the sleeper, who stirred and muttered wrathful words which ended in a snore.

‘The tree,’ muttered the watcher, ‘that was enslaved winter-long and held in bondage, is now free; he stands head in air. Soon spring will release every tree from its burden, every stream from its bondage of ice; only for man there is no release—as his life has taken shape so he must live it.

‘Well, after all, it is pleasant enough when one is out under God’s sky—if only one might remain for ever so—and if only Imperial Highnesses would condescend to awake in time for the *tok* of the capercailzie! Yesterday was a wasted day—this morning will be the same. O this waiting! In the excitement of the *tok*, one can, at least, forget.’

His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Anton Maximilianovitch choked and coughed; perhaps he had caught cold from the unusual experience of sleeping in the open air. He had not done so at his own desire but at the earnest persuasion of his august father, who

was anxious that he should become interested in something outside the circle of his daily and nightly dissipations. Anton had not taken kindly to the idea of 'sport'; the pursuit of capercaillies at dawn of a cold spring morning did not appeal to him. Yesterday he had insisted upon sleeping until three hours after the rising of the sun—far too late for the spring challenges of the great game-birds whose proceedings at this season of the year afford certain opportunities which the Russian sportsman does not neglect. But capercaillies refuse to alter the traditional habits of their tribe even to oblige grand dukes, and at the rising of the sun their spring antics are over for the day.

His Imperial Highness choked and awoke. He stared at the fire and sat up. He glanced at the keeper. 'Give me tea,' he said, 'quickly; I am cold. Why the devil did I consent to play this fool's game?'

The keeper, Volodia Pavlof, made tea; the kettle was on the boil in readiness for the awakening of his Imperial Highness. Pavlof handed the tea, the sugar-basin, and a bottle containing cognac. The Grand Duke poured out half the tea and filled up the cup with brandy. He drank the mixture with satisfaction and lay down again.

‘Your Imperial Highness,’ said Pavlof, ‘it is time we were up; the willow-grouse has called; the capercaillies——’

‘To the devil with the capercaillies; it is the middle of the night. Wake me when it is light.’

‘Highness, that will be too late.’

But Anton Maximilianovitch had said all he intended to say. He took no further notice of the keeper but promptly went to sleep again.

Half an hour later, as Pavlof sat over the fire moodily reflecting upon the idiocy of grands seigneurs who prefer to waste time in sleep when there is sport, and good sport, afoot, a low, insignificant sound—coming from far away among the pines—reached his ears and caused him to start to his feet all agog with the fervour of the genuine forest-lover. Utterly ignoring, or forgetful of the respect due to high rank, he sprang to the side of his Imperial Highness and seizing his shoulder shook it violently.

‘Highness!’ he exclaimed, ‘they are challenging! The capercaillies are challenging!’

‘To the devil with their challenges and with you too,’ roared Anton Maximilianovitch. ‘Take my gun and shoot them; I will buy

them from you afterwards. What does it matter who shoots the infernal things so long as my father sees them, if he must. At any rate, be off: I will not budge until sunrise.'

'But, Highness, what of Maximilian Petrovitch? I was to show you this day the capercailzie *tok*, and how the birds are to be stalked.'

'If my father sees the dead birds it is all he will require. Go, you fool; I tell you I will sleep.'

Seeing that further argument was useless, Pavlof picked up the Grand Duke's gun, a magnificent weapon by Holland, and departed without another word. The capercailzies were now busy challenging at every point of the compass; the forest seemed alive with their 'song,' as the Russians term it. The challenge, employed only in the mating season, consists of a preliminary noise which is like the knocking of two sticks together, followed by an insignificant warbling sound no louder than that of a chaffinch. While the huge bird is uttering this warble, however, he is so blinded and deafened by passion, whether amative or combative, that he is unable to take cognisance of anything that happens even close under the tree upon which he sits.

Aware of this phenomenon in natural history, the sportsman is able to take advantage of the fatal moment of excitement by making several long steps or leaps towards his prey, remaining motionless while the capercailzie is silent, but springing forward again with energy so soon as he recommences his singing.

Pavlof was a past master in the art of stalking the capercailzie. He paused a moment in order to decide which of the challengers 'sang the strongest'—was most likely, that is, to continue his song without long pauses between the 'verses,'—then, fixing upon his bird, dashed off instantly in the direction from which its challenges proceeded; five jumps and a statue-like, motionless pose; six jumps and another stop, and so on, until he found himself within forty yards of his quarry, which stood out at the top of its pine-tree, an immense opaque patch against the sky-line. Then there came a bang and a great scuffling fall, and in a moment Pavlof's hands had clutched the huge victim, for there must be no flapping of wings lest the *tok* or tournament should come to a sudden end in the startled departure of the feathered knights.

There fell a sudden silence upon the forest. The sound of Pavlof's shot had paralysed, for

an instant, even the love-ardour of the belligerent capercailzies ; but only a single bird took wing and hurtled away through the pine-trees. The rest, too excited to pay much regard to matters which would ordinarily have sent every bird of them flying a mile or two deeper into the black forest, now took the risk and stayed on. Half a minute later the challenging songs were once again in full swing.

Within a short space of time Pavlof returned to the fire, bringing with him three enormous capercailzies, which he threw down with a scornful exclamation close to the head of the snoring Grand Duke. Six hours later, when his Imperial Highness had slept his sleep out and had been driven in his luxurious troika back to St. Petersburg, he called at his august father's palace and left the birds with a short note in which he explained that he had had excellent sport, and had thoroughly learned the art of stalking the capercailzie ; his note ended thus :—

‘It is, however, an experience which I do not care to repeat, since the sport involves long hours of sleeplessness which I have found very fatiguing.’

CHAPTER III

HIS Imperial Highness having abandoned one out of the three days originally intended to have been spent in the pursuit of sport in the forest, Pavlof arrived at home one day sooner than he had announced.

Reaching the village at a comparatively early hour in the morning, he encountered Shadrine in the act of quitting his wife's cottage, while Matrona stood at the door to see him away. Her face wore an expression which Pavlof had never seen there up to this day, an expression which he would have given much to see if it had been worn in his honour. It died away, however, at sight of him, and in its place came a look of fear or guilt or shame, or God knows what, followed by one which was composed of a mixture of anger and dislike and annoyance, and kindred sentiments.

‘What is he doing here?’ asked Pavlof sharply, gazing at his wife and frowning blackly, for he was in a bad temper already, the Grand Duke Anton having annoyed

him, and felt discontented with life in general. Matrona hesitated a moment before replying.

‘It is the shopman Shadrine,’ she said; ‘he brought bread for the day and cabbage for the *schee*.’

‘Where are these things? show me.’

Matrona showed half a loaf of black bread and a couple of white ‘rosenchicks,’ rolls; but of cabbage there was none to be seen.

‘It is in the pot boiling,’ said Matrona.

‘I will look in the pot,’ replied Pavlof, pale but determined, ‘and if I find that you are lying to me, Matrona, I shall perhaps decide that we are better apart.’

‘Do as you please,’ said Matrona, ‘what care I? There is no cabbage; I lied to you because for a moment I was frightened. All the village knows that I love Shadrine, and he me—all but you. Why was I made to marry you? It is Shadrine who is my true husband.’

‘If that is so, it is as well that I should know your mind. Well, let us part awhile—that will be best. We shall both have leisure to think how to make the best of matters. Let it be said that I have volunteered for the war, that I undergo preparation in St. Petersburg. I will return when I please. Meanwhile, if you so decide, you will associate no more

with this man; it must be he or I; during my absence you shall choose.'

'How can I choose?' said Matrona surlily. 'The choice has been made for me.'

'Yes, that is the trouble. It is not too late, however, if we would have it so. I shall know how you have chosen. If you must have Shadrine, I shall know of it; then you shall hear of my death; whether I am dead or no that shall be my own affair. Until you hear of my death, remember that you are my wife.'

'How shall I live meanwhile? My father will not support me nor pay our community-taxes.'

'I shall see to it that you shall live in comfort so long as you remain my wife; you shall have money enough.'

Pavlof left his wife crying for sheer astonishment and helplessness. She had not believed that he would go. At first the realisation that he had really departed sent a rush of joy into her heart; why, she was practically free—she could do as she liked! Presently it occurred to her that there might be obstacles to freedom—her father and mother, public opinion, Shadrine's timidity. Certainly she must be careful, and so must he—if he and she were to meet, the village had better not know of it.

Pavlof knew very well what he intended to do. There was a woodman's hut in the forest, within the sphere in which the shooting rights were preserved for the benefit of his Imperial Highness. He would occupy this hut, leading for a month or two the life he best loved. The steward of the Grand Duke should be informed that it was necessary for the keeper to take this course on account of the appearance, lately, of poachers from the surrounding villages. Crops had been very bad last autumn, and some of the poor fellows had little to eat; they poached for food. Nevertheless, Volodia had no idea of allowing his employer to be robbed, let the thief be ever so hungry. Being a stickler for rights and justice and so forth, Pavlof never allowed his sympathies to override his sense of duty. Moreover, the poachers afforded an excellent excuse for taking up his quarters in the forest, which plan was peculiarly convenient to him at the present crisis.

So to the forest he now betook himself, twenty miles away from his village home, and here—but for the worry which his domestic affairs caused him—he lived happily enough. He had not, of course, fallen in love with his wife before marriage, and she had given him little opportunity for doing so since, but he

had meant to become very fond of her and to live happily with her, and his disappointment had been keen. He felt, too, a sense of shame that Matrona should have owned to her abiding preference for another man, but also, together with a certain feeling of anger towards her, a consciousness that after all the balance of actual harm done by the marriage was probably on her side. Of course he ought to have been told of the state of affairs, but in the villages very little is thought of previous attachments; they have to be got over in the best way possible; the parents really cannot be bothered with such trifles. So Pavlof kept the poachers in awe, and fed the Grand Ducal court with black game and capercailzies—which are not out of season for the Russian sportsman in the spring of the year, so long as only cock-birds are shot,—and on Saturdays, at night-time, he would ride to the village, and under cover of the darkness slip under the door of Matrona's house one five-rouble note.

Once or twice he did an hour's digging in her potato patch, and once he spent an entire night in ploughing her field, bringing his own horse, and borrowing a plough from the Starost's yard.

Matrona guessed that the work had been

done by Shadrine, but when she spoke of it and thanked him for it, he was so obviously taken by surprise that, though he did not actually deny that he had been the mysterious benefactor, Matrona saw that she must seek elsewhere for an elucidation of the mystery, and this made her think inwards.

Once, while digging at a very early hour in the morning in the little potato patch behind the house, some two months after his departure from home, Pavlof heard steps approaching down the road. He hid behind the porch of the cottage, and, finding that the night-prowler bent his steps towards Matrona's doorway, he stood forward and confronted him.

It was Shadrine, of course, who, quick as thought, turned and fled from the wrath to come. The wrath did not come. Volodia allowed him to depart, and departed also, returning on horseback to his hut in the forest. This was his last visit to the village for a long while.

Soon after this episode rumours reached the place of disasters to Pavlof.

It was reported that he had lived in the forest for several months; that a few days since he had come to the Estate Office to report that a large bear had appeared in the

district, and was busy among the growing crops of the peasants. It had killed a woman and a child. Pavlof had announced his intention of lying in ambush for the beast, but was anxious to know whether his Imperial Highness would care to take a hand in the fun. The Grand Duke Maximilian had begged to be excused.

Presumably the bear had come off best, and Pavlof second best, in the ambush prepared for his discomfiture. There were marks of trampling and bloodshed in the corner of a rye-field at the edge of the forest. There was a small pool of blood. Pavlof's gun, broken and bent, had been found on the spot, but Pavlof himself had not since appeared. The bear was still about, and doing much mischief, though apparently wounded; but it was feared that Volodia had been killed. Probably he had been mutilated and left to die; had attempted to crawl through the forest to the nearest village, or to his own hut, and had succumbed on the way.

And since nothing more was heard of him at the village, it soon became accepted as an accomplished fact that poor Volodia Pavlof had indeed been killed—perhaps eaten.

CHAPTER IV

PAVLOF was not, of course, dead, or anything like it; neither was the bear, though it was perhaps a question which was more disgusted at the moment of leaving the battle-field, with life in general; for Bruin had been alarmed and offended by a shot in the thick of his leg, which had provided the necessary amount of bloodshed for the purposes of Pavlof's scheme without doing the poor beast any very serious damage; while Volodia was so thoroughly out of love with existence in this part of the world, where fate had certainly treated him badly, that he had quite made up his mind to begin a new life under a new name and amid new associations.

There was a deep vein of philosophy and philanthropy hidden somewhere in Pavlof's inner economies together with a great desire to know more of his fellow-men, the men of the cities, and of the social and political questions which agitated the country at this time. He loved the outdoor life, true; but for the pre-

sent he was satiated with the sights and sounds of the forest and village; he needed a wider acquaintance with his fellow-creatures. As for his attempt to settle down into domestic life, it had proved a miserable failure. Pavlof was sore at heart, on this account, but he felt no doubt whatever as to the correctness of his own conduct in the matter. He had injured Matrona, quite unwittingly of course, by marrying her when she already loved another man. He had given her the choice to make the best of things as they were or to revert to her old lover; she had chosen the latter way. In that case he must disappear; wipe out the past; die—to all intents and purposes,—and rise again in St. Petersburg, under a new name. He might have learned to love Matrona; there were things about her which pleased him well; she was pretty and had nice manners, and he rather admired her faithfulness towards her first lover, even though it had wrought him much ill, for Pavlof was something of a philosopher. As matters had turned out he had been obliged to abandon all hopes of an improvement in his relations with her; she was a mere burden to him (and he to her), and she must be thrown off just as the pine-tree, that night in March, had thrown off the incubus of snow which bent

its neck towards the meaner earth ; the tree had swung back head-in-air, and so would he.

Pavlof had a sum of money by him, over a hundred roubles, savings from his salary, which had been a good one. This sum was ample to set him going in a new sphere of existence.

He went to St. Petersburg by night and took up his quarters in a cheap lodging-house. He had not forgotten the fact that, since he could no longer figure as Volodia Pavlof, and therefore must assume a new name, he was at present without a passport. This is a dangerous position in Russia. The man without passport is the man without civil rights, and may be imprisoned at sight. True, the civil rights of the lower orders, in the towns, are so insignificant as to be almost a negligible quantity ; but such as they are, a passport is the outward and visible evidence which every man, woman, and child must possess and constantly display in order to substantiate a claim to them.

At the lodging-house to which Pavlof repaired they were not in the habit of worrying their clients about passports, although by police regulations they were compelled to see to it that no man slept in the place whose papers were not in order.

Occasionally the police made a raid upon the establishment by night and carried off a certain proportion of the drowsy inhabitants of the place, and at such times the proprietors of the house were reprimanded, or perhaps fined, though not heavily, because the authorities find it convenient to wink at the existence of such places, well knowing that they may here, from time to time, find—at some lucky casting of the net—a fair-sized fish among the usual small fry.

Pavlof passed his days wandering about the town endeavouring to make up his mind where to apply for work. He was capable of secretarial or clerk's work ; he could speak French and knew something of English and German ; he was very respectably dressed—that is, about up to the level of a superior artisan or foreman, though he looked a gentleman, and kept himself scrupulously clean and well groomed. The mill hands and shop clerks and such folks among whom he lived at present, were wont to eye him askance at first acquaintance, doubtless suspecting him to be an individual set by some one to spy upon them and furnish reports ; for the lower classes have as many enemies in Russia as that unfortunate creature the rabbit has in England ; every one has a shy

at them : the weasel of the Third Section, or Secret Police Department ; dogs, foxes, the Agent Provocateur, the Revolutionist, sometimes the greedy employers—sportsmen with guns who want them for food ; irritating terriers who chase them out of their beloved bramble bushes ; insidious ferrets who drive them from their holes that the guns may have their chance. But as Pavlof became better known to these poor fellows they soon forgot their suspicions. He spoke to them as their equal ; he neither flattered them nor made obvious efforts to worm their private opinions out of them ; neither had he dangerous words to say to them as to their wrongs. They liked him and trusted him far more quickly than it was their wont to trust a stranger ; for there was something attractive about the man in spite of the unusual circumstance that he was clean and shaven and apparently a *gramatny*, or educated person.

One day Pavlof escorted a drunken man to the fetid hole in which he lived, taking all the trouble to return there after a reasonable interval, during which the fellow slept off his vodka poison, in order to lecture the wretched man and to warn him that next time he would not talk but thrash him. The ' next time ' came within a few days, and Pavlof proved as good as

his word. He thrashed the drunkard within an inch of his life ; and far from resenting it, the fellow took to him with all the devotion of a dog to its master. This little episode seemed to endear Pavlof to his present associates ; they thought it good philosophy ; ‘ We moujiks cannot be reached by preaching,’ they said, ‘ keep us from the vodka with a thick stick—it is the only argument which comes home to us.’

Unfortunately this is true. That the moujik cannot be taught except by brute force is a canon of belief inherited from the bad old days of serfdom ; the authorities hold it, and the majority of the moujiks themselves hold it also. The authorities are unwilling to educate the masses lest they should realise the degradation of their lot and learn to demand reforms ; it is so much easier to drive a flock of sheep with a stick than to be obliged to stop and reason with each animal as to why it should do this or go thither.

The conversations at those places where his friends were wont to assemble at midday for their meal and sleep were to Pavlof both interesting and amusing, and very often very saddening.

He would come in to hear some grimy, bearded fellow arguing with a neighbour about

the war with Japan, which had now been raging three months or more.

‘Devil take it, I do not understand,’ said Ivan, scratching his tousled head. ‘They are monkeys, or little better, so I have heard, not bigger than that; black as ink too; devil take them, yet it is said they have ships and guns, and if it is true as Foma read out of the *Listok*, they have had the effrontery to blow up a steamer full of good Russian sailors—Christians, mind you—’

‘Yes, and a Grand Duke, a true cousin of our Little Father himself, was on board, and actually was thrown into the water,’ interrupted the other. ‘Holy St. Vladimir, there is no end to the arrogance of these little heathen devils!’

‘Ah, but wait! Our Tsar’s arm is very long, by far the longest in the world, it is said; only wait until he has had time to thrust it out so far; he will place his hands upon the heads of these little monkey-devils and—piff! they have gone—their country is ours—their ships sunk, their little fellows that carried guns to look like soldiers—dead, every one of them; then the Japonsky Tsar must return with the rest of his people to the forest from which they came, and live in the trees.’

‘Ah! and who taught them to leave the forests and to buy guns and ships and wage war against Christians?’ cried a third man. ‘Why, the English. The English are our enemies, the *Listok* says; they wish us ill; they are in league with these Japonskys. Devil take them! Are they Christians, these English? The French are Christians, it is said, though not Orthodox.’

‘If the English are allies of the Japonskys, who are heathens, then the English must certainly be heathens also. Well, devil take it! English and Japonskys or Japonskys alone, it is all the same to our little Tsar; only let the Russian soldiers and sailors once be at them, and—piff!—they are in the sea!’

This conclusion aroused enthusiastic assent from all sides of the room.

‘They say that the English,’ said a fourth speaker, ‘live in a little island no bigger than the Vassily Ostrof—Basil Island.’ This island is a portion of the town of St. Petersburg, and measures some three or four miles from end to end. Volodia Pavlof, listening to the conversation, could not help laughing at this last assertion. ‘And the Americans?’ he asked, ‘where do they live?’

The majority of those present had not the faintest idea.

‘It is said,’ remarked one, ‘that they speak the language of the English and occupy another small island—what was I told now?—close to the English island, and even smaller.’

‘Ireland?’ suggested Pavlof.

‘Yes, yes, Ireland, that is where the Americans live, and the Japanese on a third island, all close together and near China; our little Volodia knew, you see, at once. What it is to be educated! They each have their own Tsar, all these little people—it is laughable, but I have heard so from those who know; only our own Little Father is ten times greater than all, and the Russian soldier goes where he likes.’

As Pavlof looked up from laughing at this sally he suddenly realised that a hush had fallen upon all present, and, glancing towards the door of the reeking room, he saw that a booted and uniformed personage had entered; he wore a sword and carried a portfolio

‘Passports, children,’ said the official. ‘Those who have none stand here on the left—each shall have an opportunity to explain.’

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CHAPTER V

PAVLOF had his old passport in his pocket, and in the agitation of the first moment he produced it. On second thoughts, however, and having weighed the advantage of being in possession of a passport against the disadvantage of appearing as Volodia Pavlof, who, should inquiries be made at the village, would be found to be scheduled as dead, he decided to risk detention as 'without papers.'

Then it suddenly occurred to him to make a bolt from the room, and he made it. He reached the door in safety, but at the threshold stood two gorodovui, who are the ordinary policemen of the town.

The inspector called over his shoulder.

'Stop, you there,' he said; 'where's your passport?'

'At my lodging,' replied Pavlof. 'I am on my way to fetch it.'

'Follow him, one of you,' said the inspector; and for the first time in his life Pavlof hurried away down the street with

the disagreeable consciousness that he was being shadowed.

Pavlof meant to dodge the man, and did his utmost to shake him off. He doubled down crowded little streets and back into big ones, but the bloodhound was still at his heels; he jumped into a droshka and bade the man drive 'like the devil.'

'Where to?' asked the kaftaned driver, rising to the emergency and flourishing his whip in the air.

'To the devil, if you like. I'm shadowed by the policeman just getting into that trap behind; shake him off, and you shall have a rouble.'

The patriarchal-looking individual holding the reins was charmed to take a hand in so interesting a game. He lashed up his little horse and shouted at him, first a string of the most insulting epithets and then a list of very endearing appellations, ending with rude allusions to the animal's relatives on the mother's side. Away flew the droshka, rocking from side to side, down the wrong side of the Nefsky and up the Morskoy and down by the Horse Guards and into the Nicolaefsky plain; but wherever the hare ran and doubled the hound doubled and ran after him, and Pavlof realised that he was doing no good.

‘Take your rouble,’ he said, ‘and drive fast into the Galernaya and down the street, I shall get out at the corner, but don’t stop.’

Pavlof sprang out, darting into the first open door on the left. The street was crowded with vehicles, and he had the satisfaction of seeing his pursuer pass in full chase of his droshka, which had dashed away down the road untenanted except by its excited driver.

Volodia felt a rough jog at the elbow; he turned. A resplendent schweitzer or hall porter stood behind him.

‘Out of the way, fool,’ he said; ‘can’t you see that Madame wishes to pass to her carriage?’

Pavlof doffed his hat and stood aside, apologising.

The lady was about to pass haughtily. Glancing at Volodia’s face as she did so, she paused with an exclamation of astonishment. ‘Who is this?’ she said; ‘do you seek me?’

Pavlof looked keenly in the lady’s face; she was a young woman of some twenty-two or three years, handsome and of aristocratic bearing. Obviously she was, for some reason, favourably impressed by the appearance of the youth before her, for she smiled as he looked in

her face, and repeated, 'Did you come to see me? Who are you?'

Pavlof thought he heard his bloodhound running up the pavement; he came to a sudden resolution.

'Madame, grant me five minutes' private conversation,' he said; 'I will explain.'

She turned to the schweitzer.

'Kuzma, tell Gregory to walk the horses up and down, I shall return presently.'

Kuzma went into the street, allowing the swing doors to close behind him.

'Now,' said the lady, 'you are panting, agitated; what is the matter?'

'I am pursued by the police; I have lost my passport.'

'Is that all? I will see to it—wait here.'

She followed Kuzma into the road. With him stood Pavlof's pursuer, panting and arguing; he had been directed to the house by some busybody who had seen Pavlof step into the doorway.

'What is the matter, Mr. Policeman?' she asked. The man saluted.

'A delinquent, Madame, possessing no passport——'

'Oh, but you are in error, my friend; this is my secretary you have pursued through the

town, the Saints know why. His passport is altogether in order. Give this policeman a rouble, Kuzma, and let him go.'

'But, Madame—the pristaf——'

'If your pristaf should hold you responsible for his passport it shall be sent to the Department to-morrow—there—depart, my friend; it does not look well that a heated gorodovoy should stand and argue at my door; the rouble, Kuzma; there, it shall be reported that your duty was not neglected.'

The man saluted and departed somewhat dubiously; he glanced at the rouble in his hand and his pace quickened; soon he had vanished round the corner.

Madame returned to the hall, the schweitzer holding the door for her to pass. She walked up the wide stone stairs as far as the first floor, where a curtained door stood open.

'This is my flat,' she said; 'enter after me.' She led the way into a boudoir, Pavlof following. A surprised lady's maid hurried forward to take her parasol and gloves, but Madame waved her away. 'Shut the door,' she said; 'I have business with this gentleman.' The maid slightly raised her eyebrows, but obeyed without a word. Madame sat down, signing to Pavlof to do the same, but he refrained.

‘Madame, how shall I thank you,’ he began, but she interrupted with a gesture.

‘That is nothing. You have lost your passport—give me full details of your name and occupation, address,—I have a friend at the Department; you shall have a passport. Is that all your trouble?’

‘It is all, Madame, but without your assistance it would be enough and to spare!’

‘Well, well, maybe, who knows? As to this new passport—first, your name.’

‘Madame, I have none,’ he said, hanging his head. She laughed.

‘The old one is to be forgotten and the new one is not yet chosen, is that it?’

‘It is true that I have abandoned my name; in that name I hold a passport. As for occupation, I have none as yet, neither have I an address.’

Madame laughed heartily. ‘Then you may start upon a clean sheet,’ she said. ‘Well, choose any name you please, also any address or occupation—I shall see that the passport is sent to you. You wonder why I can perform this miracle? I have friends who will do me a favour, that is all. You will wonder also why I am prepared to exert myself on behalf of a stranger. I will tell you. It is because your

face reminds me of a friend, only yours is younger and handsomer. Come now, my coachman is a Tartar and scolds me if I keep the horses waiting. As to this passport, write down on this paper the name you choose to use.'

Pavlof chose the name Drugof, and wrote it down. He paused; what about an address? She divined his difficulty and bade him set down the address at which he passed the last night. 'As for occupation,' she laughed, 'I told the policeman that you were my secretary; that need not matter if you have anything better to set down; we shall explain that you are just leaving my service.'

Volodia flushed. 'I have no occupation at present,' he said. 'As well set down one thing as another; I have written "secretary."'

'Good. You shall fetch the passport from here to-morrow morning.'

Pavlof expressed his gratitude. 'May I know the name of one who is doing me so great a service?' he added.

'That is easily told. Nathalie Alexandrovna Oodine; occupation, fairy godmother; address, which I trust you will remember, 3 Galernaya.' She laughed merrily, showing a beautiful set of white teeth.

‘Certainly I shall remember,’ said Pavlof; ‘as soon I shall forget to be grateful.’

‘That is the thing which is most easily forgotten of all things,’ she said; ‘we shall see.’

When Pavlof had gone, she rang the bell for her maid.

‘Lizette,’ she said, ‘you saw the youth who entered with me?’

‘Mais oui, Madame,’ replied Lizette; ‘certainly I saw.’

‘Whom is he like?’

‘Mon Dieu, Madame, he is like *him*: as like as two peas; any one might see it.’

‘So thought I; it is wonderful. There are coincidences in the world.’

CHAPTER VI

PAVLOF, as he left the elegant flat in the Galernaya, and walked towards the more squalid quarter of the town in which his own lodging was situated, felt much touched by the kindness of the stranger who had befriended him. It occurred to him that there must be far more good feeling among the upper classes than was generally believed. Why had she befriended him? Because he reminded her of some one—doubtless one she loved. Well, that argued good feeling in a woman. It did not occur to him that his personal appearance was such as is extremely attractive to women. Pavlof was, in fact, a very handsome man, tall and straight, somewhat slender; he had a sun-browned complexion, and his face, though not exactly intellectual, was intelligent and refined. His manner was attractive also; he was—if one may use the term of one born in a rank scarcely above that of the peasants—aristocratic, and spoke like a gentleman.

He felt that he had not treated his new

friend as she deserved. He ought to have reposed some confidence in her. She had been kind to him, and undoubtedly saved him from trouble which might have proved serious : yet he had refused to tell her even so much as his name.

‘I shall put it right when I go for my passport,’ he reflected.

Pavlof was a perpetual wonder and mystery to his friends at the cheap and unsavoury lodging-house which he inhabited, but when he reported to them the manner of his escape from the gorodovoy and the friendly offices of the stranger who promised him a passport, the good fellows evinced great alarm on his account.

‘Passport or no passport do not go near her again,’ they told him in effect. ‘Are you so simple-minded ? You are a gramatny and wiser than we are, but better than to know arithmetic is it to know friends from foes. Such things as you describe are not done without an object. Keep away from her.’

‘Not I,’ laughed Volodia ; ‘she will do me no harm. Why should she ?’

‘Ah ! Why should she ? Why are we worried for passports ?’ said a sulky-looking man, Tumanof, who never had a good word to

say for any one above his own standing. 'Why are we hounded this way and that by the police, curse them, and why do we eat black bread and work fourteen hours a day, while others do no work, and yet eat caviare and fat sucking-pigs?'

'You speak like a fool, Tumanof,' said another. 'One man is born a prince and one a peasant. What sort of a prince would you make? You would be laughed at and called a fool, which indeed you are. Nevertheless, Volodia, do not go back to your new friend; though you are gramatny, you are young and lack wisdom.'

'Maybe so; but I shall certainly go.'

'All that these people give they expect to see back. If she should make love to you, what then?'

Pavlof burst out laughing. 'Truly, you are all fools to-day,' he said. 'First it is one thing, then another, and each more foolish than the last. To-morrow you shall see that I have my passport, and that I am still as I am now and shall remain.' At which expression of his pig-headedness some present crossed themselves, others shrugged their shoulders, and some spat and scratched their heads.

Pavlof went to the Galernaya on the following morning and was received kindly. His

passport was ready for him, made out exactly as arranged; Madame Nathalie Oodine placed it in his hands.

‘It looks old and crumpled,’ she said smiling, ‘but that is for the sake of realism, in case you should be asked why your papers are new. Now, have you patience to listen to me? I do not intend to be inquisitive or to pry into matters which do not concern me. You are seeking employment?’

‘That is true. As to prying into my affairs, you have not done so; I feel ashamed that I did not offer you more confidence yesterday, but——’

‘But there are circumstances—I quite understand. As to this you shall use your discretion. Meanwhile, supposing that I should need a secretary—you smile, why? It occurs to you that the work would be a sinecure; you are wrong. I am not altogether an idle woman. Follow me, I will show you my office.’ She led him into a kind of cabinet furnished with telephones, a writing-desk, and such matters. ‘The work would not be hard, but work there is; it would be mostly outside the house, but the writing would be done here. What say you?’

‘But, Madame, what is the nature of the

work? How can I tell whether I am capable of performing it to your satisfaction?’

‘You have good manners, also you possess two ears. That is all the equipment necessary. I am frank, you see. I require you to walk about among your fellow-men, and to remember what is said by them.’

Pavlof flushed hotly. ‘I understand,’ he said angrily; ‘in return for this passport I am to be your spy, your eavesdropper. I am to listen, I suppose, for treasonable expressions, to make a note of the speaker, perhaps to mark him down, and to report progress to yourself. You, I conclude, are an agent of the police. I have heard there is such a profession. I congratulate you, Madame, upon your position. Continue your search for a secretary. As for the passport’ — Pavlof made as though he would tear the document in two. She stretched out her hand.

‘Stop,’ she said; ‘you are very impetuous. In one short sentence you have jumped to several erroneous conclusions. I ask nothing from you in return for the passport. I offer innocent employment for which I should pay well. I do not desire evidence of the treasonable utterances any more than of the loyalty of the people, neither have you any right to assume that I should take any particular side in politi-

cal matters. I do not. I am engaged in studying the situation: I want the opinions of people of every class; to learn what is said of the war, of the Government, of the Tsar, of the gagging of the press—everything. Is it so ignoble to desire information? I wish to reach a conclusion and to form a theory—not to persecute this person or that.'

'If that is so,' said Pavlof, feeling ashamed, though not quite convinced, 'I have wronged you.'

'Yes, you have wronged me. Make amends by keeping the passport, and giving me your friendship. You are honest, I perceive, and I respect you for your indignation, though it was roused by misunderstanding. Let us shake hands.'

Pavlof felt some remorse, especially since he was conscious that he ought to be convinced of her good faith, yet he was not.

'I do not understand,' he faltered. 'This passport, now, you must be on good terms with the authorities.'

'I see your difficulty; I have powerful friends who are willing to do me such small services; there is a party in the Government anxious to learn the true tendency of thought among the Russian people in order that when

the agitation for reform begins, as begin it must before long, they may be in a position to advise the Tsar as to the direction in which changes are really needed and desired.'

Pavlof was astounded. Assuredly he had never dreamed that any of those magnates who formed the bureaucracy of Russia, and to whom his new friend alluded as 'the Government,' were moved by honest and sympathetic aspirations for the comfort and advantage of the proletariat. He had been accustomed to believe that to feather his own nest and to keep inviolate his own seat at the Council of Ministers and in the favour of the August Ruler was the *summum bonum* of the Russian bureaucrat. In order to do so, Pavlof knew well that no minister could afford even to mention reforms and the needs of the people—most unpopular subjects in the highest circles.

'If the Government is desirous of knowing the views of the people,' Pavlof began, but she interrupted him—

'I did not say the Government, but a party in the Government. The party is not a very strong one perhaps, as yet, though its president is a Grand Duke and a man of weight, but the time may come when its influence at the Winter Palace may be greater.'

'If this party wishes to know the mind of the people there are many who would enlighten them without being paid for it,' said Volodia; 'of whom I am one.'

'Does that mean that you will keep me advised of the opinions of those among whom you move? I should indeed be grateful.'

'Gladly I would do so, under your guarantee that there is no question of individuals, or of "Reports," and possible trouble for those whom your friends profess to desire to benefit.'

'That guarantee I offer freely; there is no question of individuals; it is the tendency of thought, the general opinion of the people which is needed. You have facilities for studying the people, living, as you say you do, among them. I ask for the benefit of your experience.'

'From time to time you shall have it. I will trust you. But as for receiving money for such a thing, God forbid. I shall take work among them and study them. If I learn anything of interest, I shall judge whether it is worth while to tell you of it.'

Upon this understanding Pavlof departed. He was jealously questioned by his friends of the slums, who gazed with suspicion upon his passport.

‘What have you paid her for it?’ they asked, and when he replied that he had paid and would pay nothing, they laughed. ‘Those who can procure passports for the asking must sit very near the Tsar,’ they said; ‘and the big ones give nothing for nothing. Listen, and be wise. You have your passport—good; now disappear and do not go near her again, or that passport may yet cost you very dear!’

CHAPTER VII

DURING the next month or two Volodia Pavlof, having first accepted daily work as an operative in some large cigarette works on Basil Island, rose quickly to be departmental inspector, and then, the manager finding that he was an educated man and able to correspond in at least two languages, was passed into the counting-house. Here he received good pay, and found himself comparatively rich again. He lived no longer in the cheap lodging-house, and therefore saw less of his old friends, the *omnium gatherum* of the poverty and squalor of St. Petersburg. He kept, however, in touch with them, and also with Nathalie Oodine. To her he brought many reports of significant sayings of the poor and lowly, as he had promised to do, never naming names, though, for that matter, he had no suspicion that it might be really dangerous to do so. With Nathalie he had many arguments, from which he gradually learned to know her mind, when it became clear that though his friend seemed to have

the case for bureaucracy so much at her finger-ends that occasionally she would almost appear to hold a brief on behalf of things as they are and against reform, yet it was certain that the cause of the people was in reality closer to her heart. Like all Russians who are in touch with the governing body, Nathalie was oppressed with the knowledge that reforms, however just and however obviously needed, are so difficult of attainment by constitutional means in an autocratic country that the mind recoils in face of the difficulties arrayed before the would-be reformer.

‘At present the reactionary party is far too strong,’ Nathalie would explain. ‘The Tsar is benevolently disposed, but when he would blow one way the Grand Dukes are sure to blow the other, and Pobiedonostsef blows the hardest of all, and always in opposition to reform. One day a man will arise who will have paramount ascendancy over the mind of the Tsar, who is weak and yet obstinate, helpless yet all-powerful.’

‘That man must come quickly!’ said Pavlof, ‘or he may be too late. The autocracy is on its trial.’

Nathalie laid a hand upon his arm. ‘My friend,’ she laughed, ‘say what you please when there are none but you and I present;

otherwise be careful how you utter such a sentiment as this.'

Gradually the man and the woman became fast friends; each was much attracted by the other. It had not as yet occurred to Volodia that a man may fall in love gradually and almost unconsciously, or that he himself was in any danger of doing so. As for Nathalie, it so happened that as her maid Lizette brushed her hair one night she presumed to warn her mistress—assuming a laughing manner—that she must not forget how fascinating she had already once found a set of features like Monsieur Drugof's, (the name by which the woman knew Pavlof), and that she therefore would do well to beware of the effect of a second and younger face made in a similar handsome mould. Nathalie flushed a little and bade Lizette hold her tongue. Presently, however, she asked the girl to which of the two faces, both so handsome, she would give the palm for beauty. 'O Madame,' said Lizette, 'one is august and beautiful, the other beautiful—and young.' This reply seemed to make Nathalie very thoughtful, for she spoke no more that evening, but only sighed once or twice.

Occasionally, when Pavlof visited his friend

after dusk, he would meet a muffled figure in uniform leaving the house. Kuzma would show the greatest deference to this visitor, Volodia observed ; but when he inquired of the schweitzer who this occasional caller might be, Kuzma merely replied that he was an official from one of the Departments.

Once, as he entered the house, Pavlof caught a glimpse of an inch or two of the muffled face, and the sight caused him considerable agitation.

‘ Nathalie, I wish you to tell me truly and frankly from whom you have just received a visit, and what he did here ? ’

Nathalie’s face paled, suddenly, to the colour of paper.

‘ It is a friend,’ she faltered. ‘ Why do you ask ? ’

‘ But his name—his name ? ’

‘ Volodia, do not ask me ; there are reasons why he desires his name kept secret ; do not ask me.’

‘ If that is so, it is right that I should tell you that I believe I have recognised your friend.’

Nathalie said nothing for a moment, but it was obvious that Pavlof’s words had greatly agitated her.

‘ Tell me,’ she faltered at length, ‘ whom you

imagine him to be. I would wager you are mistaken.'

'He is one to be respected in some ways, but despised in others; as, for instance, he is one whom I should be sorry to see in any woman's society, more especially in that of one whom I—in whom I am interested. A man of high rank—have I said enough? If he had not wished to be seen he should have more carefully hidden his face. This is a man to beware of, Nathalie.'

'There are many of whom that may be said,' she retorted, flushing. 'This one has been a good friend to me.'

Pavlof said no more. After all, he thought, it was not his business. If Nathalie chose to number the Grand Duke Maximilian among her friends, she must be allowed to do so. Doubtless she could take care of herself.

Pavlof's frequent visits to the house, and the influence which he obviously exercised over her mistress did not please Lizette, the pretty French maid. One day it so happened that his Imperial Highness called when Nathalie was out, and Lizette determined to take the opportunity of putting in a word of warning. Lizette had the honour of the Grand Duke's acquaintance; her piquant face had proved a

sufficient introduction on occasions when Madame had been out of the way.

‘Madame has lately made a new acquaintance, Monseigneur,’ she said, ‘and he has become a frequent visitor. Shall I tell Monseigneur why Madame was first attracted to this youth? It was the likeness which he bears to Monseigneur.’

‘Then she may be the sooner forgiven,’ laughed the Grand Duke.

‘Ah, ah! But he is younger, Monseigneur! He is very handsome!’

‘So? What is his name?’

‘Monseigneur, ask Madame. Say you have met a young man in the entrance-hall. I must not say more lest I get into trouble.’

‘Ah, you are warning me, is it not so? I am to be jealous.’ The Grand Duke laughed heartily. ‘Well, well, I shall not tell tales; fear not, *mon enfant*! As for jealousy——’ His Imperial Highness, who was a man of some fifty-three years but still handsome, looked in the glass and twirled his moustache, but said no more.

When Nathalie and he were alone, presently, however, he broached the subject. He had seen a youth enter as he drove away a few days since. What was his name?

Nathalie flushed a little. 'Did Monseigneur observe him?' she asked, evading the question. 'He is very handsome. In order that your Highness may not be jealous I will tell you that my interest in him had its birth in the fact that he is like you.'

'Indeed? Does that mean that he is my double, or that his face is merely reminiscent of my own?'

'He is very like; one might call it a coincidence, but——' Nathalie paused.

The Grand Duke laughed aloud. 'Proceed,' he said.

'But that he is so very like——'

'This is interesting—and his name? You have surely learned this much at least of your captivating stranger.'

'His name is Vladimir Drugof.'

'Which is perhaps a *nom de guerre*.'

'Possibly; it is the name by which he is known.'

'Ah, and he comes from—where?' But this information Nathalie could not give.

'Then I must see your friend, *ma petite*. It is interesting to know that one has a double.'

CHAPTER VIII

It so happened that not very long after the observation of his Imperial Highness that he must see the young person whom both Lizette and Nathalie had pronounced to be his living image, Pavlof chanced to be in the house one evening when Nathalie had not yet returned from her drive, and, as he sat awaiting her return, in walked the Grand Duke Maximilian.

Pavlof sprang to his feet, blushing and confused. The Grand Duke laughed.

‘What, *you*?’ he said. ‘By the Saints, I suspected as much! Fortunately no other of those who claim relationship with me has done me the honour to reproduce my features so accurately as yourself!’

‘Pardon, Highness, I have never made any such claim as you suggest.’

‘The more credit to you. What do you here, my friend—you that were eaten by a bear?’ The Grand Duke laughed very loud; he was, as a matter of fact, benevolently gratified that Pavlof had proved himself alive.

‘There were circumstances which compelled me, Highness, to quit your service without notice. I fell into trouble.’

‘So I gathered. Shall I guess that you found married life somewhat less agreeable than you had expected?’

‘My married life was a fiasco. Her fool of a father, the drunken priest Gavril, compelled her to marry me without warning me that her heart was elsewhere. This was not fair to either of us; the poor girl was miserable—she made no secret of her preference for the old lover—what could I do? I could live well enough without her, she could not do without her lover, therefore I disappeared. The bear was a convenient incident, nothing more; I should have disappeared in any case.’

‘Well, receive my felicitations that you are alive. Frankly, I disbelieved the story of the bear; it was not, I told myself, consistent with the woodcraft and so forth of so great a sportsman. Well, and what now? You have found respectable employment?’

‘I am a clerk in a factory counting-house; I prefer the woods, but at present I am engaged in the study of my fellow-men, of whom I find I have known too little.’

‘My friend, they are a poor study; the less

you know of them the better you will like them.'

'With respect, I disagree. I am deeply interested. I move among the moujiks; already I am quite learned upon the subject of their political aspirations.'

'The political aspirations of the moujik? You might as well talk of the political aspirations of a herd of cows, my friend. They have none.'

'Again, Highness, with respect, I disagree. It is true that the great majority have not yet learned to think for themselves; but there are those among them who are slowly learning and teaching others. They have realised their own ignorance and are anxious to learn. One day, when they have discovered what they wish for they will ask for it, and when the people ask the people must receive.'

'Holy Apostles! my good friend, who taught you that?' laughed the Grand Duke. 'Be assured that you are mistaken. You forget that we live in Russia.'

'Highness, even in Russia the voice of the people must, in the end, become audible.'

'Well, we shall see. Meanwhile—I speak as a friend—do not become involved in the foolishness of the agitators who clamour for

changes without knowledge of the difficulty which faces the reformer in this country. I have a right to speak thus, being one of the few of my caste known to be in favour of reform. Russia must develop very slowly—let our children's children see to it. Meanwhile, what do you here ?'

'Madame rescued me in a moment of danger. Your Highness may remember that my name was Pavlof, before I had the misfortune to be mauled by a certain wild beast in your forests ? Having once died, I naturally required a new name ; but a new name in Russia means a new passport. Being chased from pillar to post by the zealous police I took refuge in the porch of this house ; here Madame saw me and took pity ; for this kindness I am indebted to my likeness to your Highness for which—for once—I am grateful and offer humble thanks.'

The Grand Duke laughed.

'Well,' he said, 'you have made a good story of it ; doubtless you have spoken the truth. What is your present position with regard to Madame ? Come, the truth again, please.'

Pavlof flushed. 'Your Imperial Highness,' he said, 'I have not yet learned to repay benefactions by baseness. My position is that of a grateful friend who is anxious to show his

gratitude as well as his true friendship, by proving that both can exist without *arrière pensée*.'

'Well, that is not so badly answered, though I know not why you should have concluded that I suggested otherwise; I did not. What I intended to ask you was this: are you employed by Madame in any capacity? do you, in fact, give her *quid* for her *quo*? She helped you to a passport, what do you do for her?'

'With respect, Highness, that is a matter between Madame and myself only.'

The Grand Duke frowned, and was about to speak angrily, but apparently altered his mind.

'Well, perhaps I can guess,' he said. 'You are, I perceive, interested in the people and their position; so, I know, is Madame; you are acting in the capacity of eyes and ears to her, is it so?'

'Monseigneur, if Madame desires to give you any information about me, let her do so,' said Pavlof; and, finding at this point an opportunity to make his escape, he moved towards the door.

'One moment, my friend,' said the Grand Duke; both men were standing, and to an observer the great resemblance in face and figure must have been very striking. 'As you

are aware, I have from the first taken a benevolent interest in your welfare; we need not, I think, make special reference to my reason for desiring to befriend you; your character pleases me—let that be sufficient. I would ask you to beware of rash and foolish advisers——’

Pavlof bowed and laughed.

‘I shall remember your Highness’s advice,’ he said; ‘for the rest, I think I am able to take care of myself.’

‘Maybe. If you should need protection or assistance—financial or otherwise—you will remember that I am prepared to continue my benevolent attitude towards you as heretofore.’

‘When next I enter into your Highness’s service,’ said Pavlof, ‘I shall be pleased to touch your Highness’s money, but, with respect, not until that moment.’ He bowed low and departed. Maximilian gazed after him thoughtfully. It is possible that he made a mental comparison between this youth and his son the Grand Duke Anton, not altogether to the advantage of the latter; at any rate he sighed and remained pensive until Lizette entered with a lamp, when his thoughts assumed a lighter tone.

Lizette was privileged by old acquaintance

and many confidential conversations in the past to address remarks to Monseigneur, even before being herself addressed.

‘Monseigneur has seen the youth who has presumed to borrow some of Monseigneur’s beauty of presence,’ she said. ‘Did we not say truly, Monseigneur, that there is a likeness?’

‘Doubtless,’ said the Grand Duke, ‘though others are better judges than those chiefly concerned. How stands the youth with Madame?’

‘Madame has said many times that he is almost as handsome as Monseigneur, and younger. Nevertheless, at present I think there is no harm done. For the future, who can answer?’

‘I did not allude to the sentiments of Madame. What of the youth himself?’

‘Monseigneur, I am not a specialist in the love-symptoms. Madame is beautiful and attractive—her society might be a danger to any man. Monseigneur will remember that I presumed to give him warning.’

‘As yet there is no danger; nevertheless, watch and keep me informed.’

This conversation was worth twenty-five roubles to Lizette, who being of the Mammon

of unrighteousness, accurately recognised that the patronage of his Imperial Highness was of far greater importance both to her mistress and herself than that Madame should fall in love with the insignificant young man who, through no merit of his own, had somehow come by the good looks of the Grand Duke.

The latter magnate did not say much to Nathalie as to his interview with Pavlof. He mentioned that he had seen and spoken to him.

‘He is a handsome youth,’ he said; ‘perhaps you are right that he is like me. The young fool spoke of politics; if you are his friend, warn him that he treads on dangerous ground.’

‘He is very sane,’ Nathalie laughed; ‘I think he looks both ways before crossing the road.’

CHAPTER IX

AT the village of Karapsin things were going unsatisfactorily. The priest, Father Gavril, caused much scandalous talk in the district by reason of his intemperance. To do him justice, it must be said that he was never drunk on Sundays; but if by chance he was called upon during the rest of the week to perform any such occasional function as a funeral, a wedding, or a visit to a sick person, it might be taken for granted by those who went to summon him that he would be found to be tipsy, possibly so much so as to be incapable.

If excuses may be pleaded for such a state of affairs, Father Gavril certainly had some excuse at present. Matters had gone very badly with his daughter Matrona, Pavlof's wife.

When the report of Volodia's death reached the village, Matrona had made a show of weeping; to do her justice she did honestly cry, and that from a variety of emotions. There was, of course, the feeling that she had treated

her husband very badly. Even during the short days of their domestic life together she had not allowed him to live under any misapprehension as to her feelings; she made it abundantly clear that she had not wanted him for a husband, and had preferred her lover Shadrine both before marriage and after. Then there was a strange sensation of regret that she should have lost Pavlof; in spite of the fact that he had figured in her life as the undesired husband, she could not but remember that he had been an extremely handsome personage, well-off too, and in a good position. Now she had lost him, and the loss somehow led her to make comparisons between the two men, Pavlof and Shadrine. Of course Shadrine would marry her now. He was not nearly as handsome as Pavlof, but then she loved him and had sacrificed so much for him; every one in the village knew that well enough—she had not taken much trouble to conceal the nature of her relations with Shadrine. Indeed, taking one consideration with another, it was just as well that poor Pavlof had been put for ever out of the way by the bear; yet for some reason or other she felt a sense of regret.

Perhaps the sensation was a kind of pre-

monitory inkling that there might be trouble with Shadrine. There *was* trouble, and it came pretty soon.

For a few weeks after her widowhood Shadrine visited Matrona frequently, then gradually his visits became less frequent; when he did come he never alluded to a marriage in the future. When Matrona broached the subject once, he said that before such a thing could take place he must sell the good-will of his shop here and start business in some other village.

‘Why?’ asked Matrona in some surprise.

‘Because it would be well that you should break with your father,’ said Shadrine; ‘his behaviour is a scandal in the place. Moreover, your own reputation here is not of the best; as I say, we must remove to another village if we wish to marry.’

‘If we wish—but there is no doubt that we wish; have we not agreed a hundred times over that we cannot live without one another?’

‘There is no need to part,’ Shadrine laughed; and he left her without explaining his meaning.

Then there came rumours from Ostrof—a village some eight miles away—that Shadrine

paid rather frequent visits to the place, and that the daughter of the shop-monopolist there—a rich girl—seemed to be an object of interest to him.

Matrona heard the rumours, and when next Shadrine came to see her, she asked about this strange woman.

‘What have you heard?’ Shadrine inquired, flushing.

‘That you constantly visit her; that people speak of a betrothal; that she is very rich.’

‘Rich, and more,’ said Shadrine; ‘she is an honourable woman in herself, and her father is a respectable trader. Doubtless the rank of a trader is below that of a priest, but at least there is no scandal attached to his name.’

Matrona flushed up.

‘If I am a dishonoured woman, as your words imply, whose fault is that, yours or mine?’

‘For a man it is no great thing,’ Shadrine laughed; ‘but to marry a woman with a bad name is a thing to think of once and twice again. The people of the village here have many unkind things to say of you, Matrona, and also of me, because of you.’

‘They will have yet more to say of you,’ she retorted, her eyes flashing with anger, ‘if you

go to Ostrof for a wife, leaving me in the mire, into which who but you plunged me!’

‘Let them say what they will, what care I?’

‘They will not buy your wares; already there are some who prefer to go to Gatchina rather than deal with you.’

‘That is because I raised my prices. I will make my *koomach* a farthing a yard cheaper, and my black bread a kopek a loaf cheaper also, then these fools will come running back to me.’

‘Well, marry this woman if you please, but——’

‘I did not say I should marry her.’

‘And leave me in the shame which is of your making——’

‘Neither did I say I should leave you.’

‘But if I am so treated as would now seem to be your intention, do not think that you shall escape, my friend, without punishment. Love, insulted and mortified, turns to hatred.’

‘It is a praiseworthy act to recognise that one has lived in sin, and to recover oneself before it is too late.’

‘Bah—your false tongue wearies me—cease talking, in pity. Do you think I am so blind that I do not discern in all this foolish argument the vile hypocrisy and perfidy which are in your

heart? You do not even take the trouble to dissemble your villainies. Well, marry this Ostrof woman, only remember that I am to be reckoned with.'

'If you mean that you will tell her of the love I once felt for you and of yours for me, do you not know that there is nothing that pleases a woman so well as to know that she has ousted another from the heart of the man she loves?'

'I will warn her of your vileness and perfidy, and if that is not sufficient for her, I will yet find a way to prevent your marriage with her.'

'Well, let us wait and see what we shall see.'

'My father will not sit still and——'

'Your father! It is time he ceased to preach the moralities to others. Come, we speak foolishness, Matrona; I may marry this Ostrof woman or I may not. I would certainly have married you six months ago, in spite of the scandal of your father's house. Was it my fault that another man came between us and——'

'He did not come between us; that is a lie.'

'How not? You became his wife, and I was left to dance alone while all the village laughed. Now it is your turn to dance. Why must I be blamed if I also wish to marry a stranger?'

‘Blame? I shall not blame you; the time for blaming is ended; the hour has come to curse or to kill.’

‘Kill? Oh—oh! Is that a threat? What a pity there is no witness! Well, if I am murdered, doubtless your name will be the first to be put under suspicion. Men and women—the whole village—will say, “This woman had a lover, and he forsook her for Proskovia of Ostrof, whom he loved better, and who had a better name. In her shame and grief this Matrona turned upon the man she loved—and she will spend the rest of her life in Siberia.”’

‘Then your mind is made up. You have forgotten your promise; you will marry, but not me; and you will bequeath me to the scorn and laughter of the village?’

‘Not so; I bequeath you to Senka Harkof, who is anxious to have you—so anxious that he has more than once desired to fight me for you. Here is a man who will marry you in spite of all; and he knows all, be sure! Be wise, and take what you can get.’

This Senka Harkof was the dissolute son of an old widow woman in the village, who hoarded every farthing she could earn, in order that when he came periodically from St. Peters-

burg, where he was a mill operative, he might have a rouble or two to take back with him. The man was a worthless scamp, and Shadrine knew it well; so did Matrona, who had for years turned a deaf ear to his tipsy courtship. For Shadrine to recommend the man as a suitor ready to take her 'in spite of all' was the crowning insult of a conversation in which he had taken no pains to gild the pill he administered.

Matrona went crying to her father's house, where her mother was soon in possession of the whole story. Father Gavril listened also, and though his understanding was thickened as usual with vodka, the tale worked its way in, and the news went a long way towards sobering him.

CHAPTER X

THE immediate effect upon her father of the black news which Matrona had brought home to her parents was to let loose from his lips a storm of abuse, of which a large portion broke upon the head of his unhappy daughter. Very clearly, albeit the enunciation was not so plain as it might have been, very clearly and vividly the priest described the conduct of Matrona both before and after her marriage. Naturally, he said, her lover would think twice before marrying so degraded a specimen of humanity. Few men would take such a woman for wife while there were plenty of respectable maidens to be had.

When Father Gavril had reduced his daughter to the verge of hysterics, he fetched out of the cupboard the bottle of vodka which his wife had replaced there, vainly hoping thus to set a term to his potations for the day.

An hour later, being now the tipsier by an hour's additional drinking, he went staggering

down the street to the village shop, where he found Shadriné in attendance.

Shadrine's face paled, for he guessed that Matrona had already carried her tale to her parents.

'What is this I hear from my daughter?' shouted Father Gavril, the moment his eyes fell upon Shadrine.

'How should I know what you have heard?' said Shadrine, putting a bold face upon the matter. 'Come into the living-room if you wish to speak to me; by standing and bawling here in the shop you will ruin my trade and give me a bad name.'

'A bad name! That is what your shameful conduct with my daughter has already brought upon you and upon her; and now I hear that you refuse to marry her.'

'I did not refuse,' said Shadrine. 'I may marry her, and I may not.'

'You lie, for you gave her to understand that you will marry some stranger in Ostrof. Come, is it so or is it not?'

'My mind is not yet fully made up. It is time my shop was closed; will you depart, if you have not come to buy? You speak too loudly; the villagers will come presently to see what is happening here.'

‘Let them come, and let them listen. As for me, I shall not depart until I have said my say, which is this.’ Father Gavril then launched forth into an eloquent explanation of his opinion of a man who, like Shadrine, could treat a woman so despicably as he had this day served his daughter Matrona. The priest painted Shadrine’s conduct in glowing colours. If he did not soon alter his mind and act honourably by her, terrible things would happen to him. He should not escape chastisement in this world, and as for the next, his condition there would be miserable indeed.

‘I will go my own way,’ said Shadrine. ‘The threats of a drunken man are like the barking of a dog, but not so terrifying. Go away, and let me close my shop—it is time.’

Father Gavril, having said his say, departed. Shadrine saw no more of him, neither did he visit Matrona again. His visits to Ostrof, however, became more frequent, and there soon came to Karapsin news of his approaching marriage with the daughter of the shopholder of that village. Shadrine, when asked, did not deny the truth of the rumours.

The Karapsin villagers made no secret of their opinion of Shadrine. No woman entered the shop to buy a yard of flannel or a loaf of

bread but flung a stone at him. He had acted shamefully, all agreed ; but while some, on the plea of spending a *grievenik* at his shop, abused him to his face for serving Matrona ill, others reviled him for going outside of his own village for a wife. Were there none he could have married at Karapsin ? If Matrona did not suit him, would not Olga have done instead, or Doonya Palkin, or Sonia Tonikof ? With every woman's tongue in the village against him Shadrine had a terrible time of it, and seriously thought of transferring his business to another place.~

One night Father Gavril, having drunk harder than usual, staggered out into the darkness and went to Shadrine's house. The place was locked up and his stable was empty, which meant that he had driven over to Ostrof, and would return about midnight as usual. The priest went into the stable and waited there, intending to address a last appeal to the man, for Matrona grew paler daily and wept almost without ceasing, and the sight of her distress maddened him.

It was unfortunate that in the stable Father Gavril, who waited there in preference to standing outside, found an axe which Shadrine had used during the day for chopping wood.

The priest took up the axe and held it in his hands. He was mad with drink and with a month's brooding over his wrongs, and the feel of the weapon filled his sodden brain with passionate thoughts.

When he heard Shadrine's *telega* come jolting down the road he hid himself in the disused half of the stable, not because he was afraid to see the man and call him to account for his treachery towards Matrona, but because he was afraid of his own present mood, which was strange and unfamiliar to him; for though drink had blunted conscience and every good feeling, and had almost blotted out the remembrance of his sacred calling, yet he was by nature a peace-loving man, and the impulses raging in his brain at the present moment were terrifying to him. He would even now have fled from the spot if he could, for he felt that at any moment passion might overmaster his reason and self-control.

But it was too late to run from the danger, for Shadrine was outside the stable-door busy over the unharnessing of his horse, and within a moment or two would lead the animal in and place him in the stall next to this one in which he stood concealed.

'He will lead the horse in and tie him by

the halter to the ring in the manger,' said Father Gavril's thoughts, 'and in doing so he will stand with his back to the entrance.'

Shadrine came in, leading the horse. Gavril heard him shuffling about, feeling in the darkness for his lantern; he found it and lighted it, and placed it in the manger.

The priest came softly from his hiding-place and looked round the corner. He had held tightly to a sack of oats or barley, setting his teeth, determined to resist the intolerable sense of being driven where he would rather not go; but the strength that dragged him away seemed greater than his own strength, and he went and looked.

There stood Shadrine, busy with the halter, just as the priest had pictured him, his head bent down towards the light, and the madman, losing his self-control at sight of him, crept in between horse and man, the axe lifted in his two hands. Shadrine heard a sound and looked over his shoulder, but he looked too late.

The horse, startled by the apparition and by the loud exclamation uttered by Shadrine, suddenly tore the halter from his master's hand, and rushed into the yard and thence into the village street, where his clattering hoofs were audible for some little while.

At the same moment the axe fell, and the horrible thing was done past recalling. The deed was, of course, regretted the moment after it had been accomplished, for with the blow those bestial impulses which had driven the murderer to strike disappeared instantly. In their place came the most intense self-loathing, remorse, horror; the desire to conceal immediately everything which might serve as evidence of the crime; inordinate cunning, which passed in review all that was likely to happen in connection with the disappearance of the victim, and the best means to avert suspicion.

The first thing to be done was obviously to remove and conceal the body. This was easily effected, for Father Gavril had merely to drag the victim to the edge of the disused village well and tip him over. This well was close to Shadrine's shop; it had become contaminated several years ago, and a new one had been dug for the use of the inhabitants. The axe was thrown down also, and the miserable murderer afterwards spent an hour in eliminating every trace of the struggle, and in raking the straw evenly over the floor of the stable. When he had done this he crept home.

CHAPTER XI

THE disappearance of Shadrine did not at first excite much interest in the village. He had probably gone, folk said, to get married at Ostrof. The man was a fool to keep his shop shut up for several days; why could he not put a substitute in the place while absent, in order that the villagers might at least regularly obtain their bread and other necessities?

Shadrine's horse had been found grazing in the communal pasture-field, a long halter trailing behind it; evidently it had broken loose from the stable. His *telega* was in the yard, too. If he had gone to Ostrof, he must have used his own legs.

Then a theory spread that he had bolted. He had certainly grown unpopular in the village, owing, in part, to his treatment of Matrona, but principally to the fact that he had threatened to go outside his own community for a wife. Perhaps he had come to the conclusion that he would do better to clear out of the district altogether. If he had behaved in

a scoundrelly fashion towards Matrona, what should prevent him from doing the same by the young woman at Ostrof? He had left his horse and cart, and a small stock of cheap clothing and so forth in his shop, and the house was his own; doubtless he would send for his property, or appoint an agent to sell it for his account whenever it should please him to do so. Meantime his shop, house, and out-houses were sealed up by the *ooriadnik*, the village policeman, and his horse was placed in the care of the communal herdsman, and so, for a certain period, all interest in the affair died out.

But Matrona was not left in peace. Senka Harkof came down to the village 'for a rest' and for the purpose of collecting such sums of roubles and kopeks as his old mother had been able to accumulate for his use since his last visit. He never remained very long away from home, because he hated work, and the long hours of his employment at the mill in St. Petersburg were most obnoxious to him.

Senka was an old admirer of Matrona's. When he heard from his mother the story of Shadrine's disappearance, and of his previous neglect of Matrona, whom all the world had expected him to marry, he realised that his opportunity had arrived.

Matrona hated the man, and had never troubled to make a secret of the fact. Very often Senka had put the question of marriage to the test, and had invariably been rejected with much scorn. Sometimes the conversation had ended in threats, sometimes in blows, for the men of the Russian villages have no compunction whatever in chastising the females if displeased with them.

Senka now came to renew his suit, and came confidently.

‘Now that your handsome husband is dead and your lout of a lover has deserted you,’ he told her, ‘you will be glad to get me, if I will still have you.’

‘When I want you I will tell you so,’ said Matrona, continuing the washing of some clothing upon which she was engaged. ‘For the present, you can go away.’

‘No, I will stay. I am not sure that I will not take you, even now. I have a kind heart. In this village you have a bad name; no one but I will have you—spoilt goods are unsaleable. What can your father spare from his drink-money for a dowry?’

‘My father’s *dubina* will speak for him; it is made of oak and very thick.’

‘*Vzdor*, nonsense; speak sensibly or not at

all; I could twist your father's backbone in my finger. I will accept a small dowry, because you shall work in our mill in Peteri, where women are employed in the spinning of yarn. Where is your father? I will discuss the matter with him; women are fools in such matters. Your father will be glad enough to find an opportunity to be rid of you.'

'In God's name, go and find him, then, and quickly. Tell him that I will marry a wolf sooner than Senka Harkof.'

'Ah! you will find me as dangerous as a pack of wolves if I find that your father is against me as well as yourself. Where is Shadrine the shopman?'

'How should I know? Find him if you want him.'

'Shadrine, who was your lover, who lost you a good husband, who had his will of you and then left you for a woman at Ostrof because he would not deal in soiled goods. Ha! ha! You must have loved him very dearly when he said such things as this. Where is he?'

Matrona paled with anger, but she said nothing; she did not realise that Senka was endeavouring to drive home a threatening suggestion.

‘You fool!’ he continued, coming nearer to her; ‘where is he, I say?’

‘Find him, beast that you are!’ she blurted out. ‘Bad as he is, I would rather by ten times have him than a foul thing like you.’

‘Ah, ah! but where is he? Do you know? Does your father know? Shall I suggest to the *ooriadnik* that maybe you know where his body is to be found?’

Matrona started and turned white.

‘What do you mean?’ she cried. ‘Is Shadrine then dead? What do you mean? Speak!’

‘Is he dead? Ah! if not, where is he? Men do not disappear, leaving good property for the crows to peck at, just because they have had the better of a woman or two and caused two villages to jeer. I say he is dead, and that inquiry should be made. There are those who might have had a hand in his death. They say that an angry woman who is also jealous may easily become a shedder of blood.’

‘Now I understand,’ cried the girl, ‘beast and wolf that you are; you are threatening me in order that I may agree to mate with you—oof! I would rather marry Judas Iscariot than a bully and villain like Senka Harkof. Go away,

lest I foul my hands by touching thee—beast ! As for the *ooriadnik*, let him do what he will. I will swear to him before God and His angels and His saints that I know nothing of Shadrine; he may be alive or dead, I know not and care not. What is Shadrine to me ?’

‘I will tell you what he is to you. I have heard from a moujik who knew him well that Shadrine declared you had threatened him—“Marry me, or I will murder you.” Is that nothing? The *ooriadnik* will be very interested to hear of this saying; he will hold an inquiry, and perhaps Shadrine will be found—who can tell ?’

Matrona now remembered that she had indeed most foolishly uttered some sort of a threat of this kind, without, however, the smallest intention of carrying it out. The idea of murder was repugnant to her; she had spoken in anger foolish words which had not been meant seriously.

‘If I spoke such words,’ she muttered, ‘I spoke them irresponsibly, as a child speaks in her sleep, or a sick person in fever; I cannot be held responsible for them. Moreover, Shadrine is not dead, and therefore I cannot be suspected of murdering him. Only a man with the soul of a wolf, like Senka Harkof, could

have invented such a thing. You are a devil, not a man.'

'At any rate, I have a man's hand, and can punish the insolence of women,' said the bully. He lifted his hand and struck her thrice over the cheek and head ; Matrona retaliated by seizing the broom in her two hands and chasing him from the house. Senka went away laughing loudly, but Matrona returned weeping and sought her mother, a poor tired old woman, weary of leading a miserable life as the wife of a dissipated man, whose failures and the dullness of whose life had driven him to the vodka bottle. The two women cried together and comforted one another, and each assured the other that there was nothing to fear in Senka's threats.

Probably Matrona herself believed that this was so. She knew, at any rate, that she was absolutely innocent ; and though she knew also that sometimes—frequently enough, indeed, in her own unhappy country—the innocent suffer for the guilty, yet she was young enough and sanguine enough to believe that she had little to fear.

With her mother the case was different. For several weeks, ever since the disappearance of Shadrine, she had been much con-

cerned by the conduct of her husband, both by night and by day.

Added to the sadly familiar trouble of the drunkenness of the priest, there had come new trouble, new fears, and dreadful new suspicions. She could not forget that on the night of Shadrine's disappearance her husband had come home late and had tossed in his bed until morning unable to sleep. Many times since then, when unconscious in restless slumber, the old man had spoken words which terrified and almost stunned her by their horrible suggestiveness. She dared not recall the exact words he had used, but she knew in her soul that they referred to Shadrine's disappearance, and that they fitted-in all too accurately with the theory, now started by Senka Harkof, that the man had been done to death.

Therefore the unfortunate woman lived in terror and anxiety, knowing not what to expect, but certain that disaster of one kind or another must soon fall upon those who were dearest to her. For not all the neglect and drunkenness of her husband, not all the disgrace of her daughter, had altered by a jot the faithful love which she bore towards both, and right gladly she would have shed her life-blood to protect either from suspicion or worse.

However, for a while Senka—still anxious to possess Matrona, for whom he cherished in his own wolfish fashion a kind of brutal infatuation—took no steps towards putting his threats into execution, and for a month or two longer things remained *in statu quo*

CHAPTER XII

RUSSIA lived, during these summer and autumn months, through some of the blackest hours of her history. Though the native press dared not fully enlighten the people as to events at the seat of war, it was known or suspected that all went awry in the Far East. Rumours of swindles by contractors were rife; of rotten food-stuffs supplied to the troops; of boots soled with paper; of shells filled with sawdust and sand; of worthless drugs and surgical necessaries supplied to the hospitals; of disaster upon disaster in the field; of warships that dared not move from their moorings; of the strongest fortress in the world tottering to its fall. Relatives of soldiers at the front could obtain no reliable news of their friends; the war was discussed by all, and by all pronounced a mistake and worse; it grew as unpopular as it had proved unsuccessful.

The revolutionists saw their opportunity and became busy propagandists among those who were as yet only passively discontented with

their lot, more especially in the towns and in the factories. On every side was grumbling and protest, the desire for change and some improvement in the conditions of life. Groups of persons accustomed to associate daily together for meals or for recreation gradually developed into little reform societies, while the secret societies already existing grew enormously—all Russia was a-buzz like a hive of bees which awake after the winter torpor, but dare not as yet venture abroad.

Volodia Pavlof was in the way of meeting many people of many classes, and consequently of hearing many opinions. Being a level-headed individual, and not given to forming hasty conclusions on impulse, his mind was so far quite open and ready to accept any conclusions as to the present urgent need of reform and the nature of the reforms needed which should satisfy his judgment. He knew, of course, that reforms were urgently needed in many directions, but he realised also the difficulty of carrying out radical changes in an autocratic country whose ruler had been brought up in the strictest tenets of a hide-bound conservatism, and who was known to be surrounded by ministers and relatives who were determined to crush every tendency on

the part of the Tsar to relax his iron hold upon the people.

Nevertheless, Pavlof grew more and more convinced at this time that whether the Romanofs themselves and the Pobiedonostsefs and Trepofs and others of their kidney would so have it or not, the people were at length serious in their determination to demand reforms, and that therefore sooner or later the reforms must come.

He declared this conclusion in a conversation with Nathalie, who admitted that matters certainly tended in the direction of changes; but at present, she insisted, 'the reactionary party is too strong, there is no good to be done by endeavouring to force the Tsar's hand.'

'But the voice of the people is the voice of God,' argued Pavlof. 'One day they will rise in their millions and demand that which they are determined to have. Mind you, I do not think they know as yet what it is that they need; every one feels that he requires this and that in order that life may be made tolerable; but as yet the man has not appeared who will formulate their demands, and with the millions whom he represents, go straight to the Tsar, as by right.'

‘Then he must have the army on his side also,’ laughed Nathalie; ‘for what would avail a million men against, say, three thousand with rifles or quick-firing guns?’

‘But surely the army would never dare,’ said Pavlof. The very idea of such a thing gave him a new fillip in the direction of disapproval and discontent with things as they were, which were gradually becoming the prevailing sentiments in his mind.

As for the cry for ‘a constitution,’ which at this time was to be heard on all sides, Pavlof took no part in it. He did not believe in a constitution for Russia. The people were, he contended, far too ignorant. Education must become universal and compulsory, that was the first thing. Then the intelligent thought of the people must be allowed to run free, to be aired and voiced in a free press; the individual must be safe from arbitrary and capricious interference by authority; homes must be inviolate: these were the reforms which Pavlof deemed essential, together with some sort of a National Assembly in which the people should be at least represented, and which should have power at least to frame laws, even though it were, at this stage, powerless to enact them. At present no man could move an inch to-

wards freedom; against the individual were arrayed the bureaus; against the nation, the reactionary ministers, the grand dukes, the Tsar.

Pavlof came across a man at this crisis who narrated his experience in the endeavour to obtain a reasonable concession from the minister whose duty it was to superintend the commercial interests of the community. This man, a German of the name of Schmidt, was informed beforehand that he would find access to the minister a very tedious and expensive matter, but Herr Schmidt was anxious to carry his business through, and was prepared to spend several hundred pounds in greasing the palms of departmental officials.

The outlay began by the expenditure of a rouble in feeing the hall-porter of the department, in order that an entrance might be effected into the general office. Here twenty-five roubles went in obtaining an introduction to the chief clerk of a higher section, and fifty more in a further promotion. These were mere trifles, and Schmidt had not as yet made a single real step. Presently, by increasingly expensive stages, he reached the office of an actual state councillor, still far enough removed from the exalted being who sat in the

highest seat in the department, but at least the merchant felt that he had now really begun to climb.

But the actual state councillor was not encouraging in his reception of Schmidt. He did not think much of Schmidt's general scheme, and thought it unlikely that he would obtain a concession. He pointed out many weak points, or points which he was pleased to consider weak, and assumed a tired, languid air, as though the discussion bored him badly.

'I can scarcely advise you to attempt to carry the matter,' he ended. 'The minister is extremely busy at this time, and much harassed by—by sundry unfortunate events at the seat of war, where, I may tell you, he has learned the disadvantages of granting concessions for contracts and so forth.'

'I am prepared to pay a moderate sum for the privilege of an introduction to his Excellence,' Schmidt ventured, 'on the chance of being able to convince him.'

The councillor shook his head dubiously.

'I have no influence with his Excellence,' he said; 'indeed, I am somewhat under a cloud for acting somewhat too benignantly towards persons—merchants like yourself—desiring to approach his Excellence. If you happened to

be acquainted with General Abdulich, now, who is the particular friend of the minister, doubtless he might do something for you. Yes, that is a good thought! Perhaps you are acquainted with the general?’

Schmidt did not possess that honour, and admitted it.

‘Well, now,’ said the councillor thoughtfully, ‘it might be possible to persuade him to receive you, though I cannot promise. If you could interest the general in your scheme, I have no doubt that he, in his turn, would speak up for you to his Excellence. I do not see what other course—involving any chance of success—is open to you.’

Schmidt’s spirits rose. He felt, however, somewhat embarrassed, for he scarcely knew whether the gentleman with whom he was conversing stood within the bribery zone or without it. If he should offer a cheque and should thereby offend this councillor with the sounding title—he was a *Dyestvitelny Statsky Sovyetnik*—down would fall all chance of the success of his scheme.

The councillor helped him out of his difficulty. Perhaps this was not the first time he had met with a similar case of embarrassment.

‘I shall have the pleasure of writing for you

an introduction to his Excellence General Abdulich. At the same time, you will allow me to call to your notice this appeal for funds for the Departmental Benevolent Society, of which I am president.'

He handed a printed paper, the invitation upon which to subscribe to the funds afforded the opportunity Schmidt required. He left the councillor's office with an introduction to the particular friend of the minister, but with his bank balance reduced by the sum of two hundred pounds.

The councillor expressed himself as grateful to Schmidt for his contribution; at the same time he had uttered these significant words: 'The general is now in retirement, and I may tell you in confidence that he finds much difficulty in maintaining his position upon a pension which is none too generous. If you should find it possible to offer him some trifling interest in the probable profits of your concession and pay him a sum in advance of his share——' The councillor ended with the sweetest of smiles; he possessed, Schmidt said, a charming manner.

As for the old general, he was a delightful personage. Upon hearing of Schmidt's scheme he remarked, 'Of course, of course; we shall

arrange it satisfactorily,' but instead of entering into a discussion of the matter at issue he promptly launched out into a minute description of a malady from which he had suffered for many years, and on account of which he had undergone many operations; the realistic descriptions of these occupied over an hour. When Schmidt at length reopened the subject of the concession and suggested that he must insist upon offering the general a sixteenth share in the profits for two years with four hundred pounds down on account of the same, his Excellence replied, 'Yes—yes—we shall arrange it—we shall arrange it.' As for the proffered cheque, he seized and pocketed it instantly, merely remarking, 'Aha—yes—on account—good; yes, we shall arrange it.'

'A week later,' said Schmidt, 'I heard from the general. He reported that my petition had been rejected by the minister, who had pointed out many objections fatal to its acceptance. The general did not enclose a cheque.'

CHAPTER XIII

FAMILIAR as he was with the fact that the official classes of Russia are among the most corrupt in the world, Pavlof was disgusted with Schmidt's story and with the disgraceful condition of things revealed by his experience of the Bureaus. He was to encounter, at this crisis, many other instances of wickedness in high places, of the need of a free press to pass a current of fresh air over such abuses of place and power, and to create a public opinion which would gradually render such things impossible.

Public opinion was, indeed, in process of formation, though without the assistance of the Press the development was very slow. Nevertheless, people had lately become more daring in their conversation. Dangerous subjects were discussed by all classes, and discussed far more openly than at any time before this. Spies were known to be as numerous as ever, but it had become the fashion to ignore them. For this rashness some paid dearly,

but on the whole the people seemed to be less interfered with in proportion to the openness with which they discussed their grievances.

Pavlof made acquaintance, at a workman's eating-shed, with a black-browed, ferocious-looking person whose story interested him.

This man had, up to a year ago, lived the ordinary life of a peasant in the village of Deviatko, near Pskoff; a member of the Mir or village commune, a moujik wedded to the land, quite the ordinary type of lazy, hard-drinking, ignorant, despondent villagers, of whom there are some twenty millions in Holy Russia. But trouble came to the man, by name Ivan Zaitzoff, in the guise of a sudden lease of unexpected prosperity; for the lessee of the village shop at Deviatko died, and the peasants, in need of some one to take up the business, elected Ivan to succeed him. They did so because the Zemstvo authorities had promptly sent down, intending to do the community a service, a trader from Pskoff, who was willing to pay a good price for the monopoly, but who, unfortunately, possessed a name which sounded suspiciously Jewish, and this name, Abram Danielovitch, alarmed the peasants.

To the village authorities, the idea of a

Hebrew coming among them was at first rather staggering. They had had no dealings with Jews up to this time, and knew nothing of them, excepting that they were not Christians, and had rendered themselves for ever hateful to every good Russian by the antagonism of their race to the Founder of Christianity. For this reason the peasants thought God would certainly withdraw the blessing which the village had hitherto enjoyed, if they set up a Jew in their midst, and bought their food and clothing from an enemy of the Faith.

It was therefore at once resolved that an opposition shop must be set up, and Ivan Zaitzoff was elected tradesman to the village, the rest undertaking to see to the cultivation of his land whilst he should be busy in his shop. So Ivan's hut was transformed into a trading establishment, and Ivan, who was one of the few members of the community able to write his name, took steps to procure goods wherewith to supply his customers. His first move was to obtain a stock of cotton prints and red shirts, ready-made. Having no idea of the proper method of buying in the cheapest market, Ivan drove over to the next village, having first sold his reserve store of seven sacks of wheat in order to provide himself

with ready money. He found that the shopman at Ruchee was in the habit of charging his customers considerably more for their goods than old Adolf Egoritch, the last trader, used to take for the same articles at Deviatko. Nor could Ivan persuade the Ruchee trader to sell to him at below the retail rate; so that his first venture in general stock was at a higher price than his customers were willing to pay, even without the addition of a small margin of profit for Ivan's trouble. For the first three days Ivan sold no goods at all, then his black bread became uneatable, and his salted herrings went bad, and had to be thrown away. Would-be purchasers came and looked at the cotton goods, but, upon hearing the price, shook their heads and remarked one and all, 'But, brother, Adolf Egoritch sold us the same goods at a far cheaper rate; something is wrong with your arithmetic, brother; count it up again.' So Ivan's stock was left on his hands, and meanwhile the putative Jew arrived with a large caravan of tempting wares, with which he stocked and dressed his shop, making it appear a very fairy store in the eyes of the admiring rustics, who had never yet seen goods temptingly displayed.

A crowd of peasants watched the arrival, the

unpacking, and the setting out of the stock. They gaped at the goods, and stared at the Jew and his man; the men admired the various shirts, baggy trousers, and sheepskin coats displayed; while the women were loud in their praises of the prints, the fine linen, the towels, and gaudy handkerchiefs, of which there seemed to be an unlimited supply.

‘Masha, my soul,’ said one matron to her neighbour. ‘God must have forgiven this particular Jew. How else could he be blessed with so many beautiful handkerchiefs for the head?’

‘Probably you are right,’ replied Masha, ‘it is God’s will. If He ordains that we should buy from a Jew, what then? It is God’s will!’

‘We can at least ask the price of his goods,’ remarked the Starost. ‘Who are we to say that we cannot deal with this man or that? If God has sent him down here, no doubt, brothers, we are intended to buy from him, if he sells cheap enough!’ concluded the Starost, sententiously.

So in a very short time the shop was crowded with men and women handling the stock and asking the prices. It soon transpired that the beautiful goods on sale were to be had at a lower rate than even old Adolf Egoritch was

went to ask for inferior articles ; at a figure, indeed, which made poor Ivan's prices appear ludicrously high. The natural consequence was that Abram Danielovitch drove a roaring trade on his very first night at Deviatko, and the fact of his suspected Jewish origin was entirely lost sight of in the excitement of purchasing excellent goods at low prices.

As for poor Ivan, he appealed in vain for custom. 'At least buy the stock you caused me to purchase for you, brothers,' he cried, as the villagers passed his shop, laden with parcels from the opposition establishment. But one and all said, 'No, Brother Ivan, there is something wrong with your arithmetic; you must see for yourself that you are wrong. Look at these prints, four kopeks a yard cheaper than yours, and better quality, too! Verily, God has blessed this Jew, and us also, this is a good business! Tot it up again, Brother Ivan, you are wrong somewhere!'

The whole village was loud in its praises of Abram the Jew. He was so polite, in appearance quite like a real barin (gentleman), and so obliging. 'Why,' said the Starost, 'when I found I was seven roubles short in paying for that sheepskin I bought: "What does it matter, Mr. Starost?" says Abram Danielovitch;

"I'll put it down in your name, you can pay me when you like!" Well, now, brothers, Jew or Christian, no one could deal fairer or more neighbourly than that.'

So poor Ivan was left completely in the cold, and his stock of goods remained on his hands. But this was not all. The fact that he had set up a shop in opposition to Abram Danielovitch was an offence to the latter virtuous individual, and Ivan found that he had made a bitter enemy.

'Why, Starost,' Abram remarked, 'I was expressly told that this was to be a monopoly; how is it this man has dared to set up a shop in opposition to mine? This is an illegality!'

'So it is, so it is, Brother Abram Danielovitch,' the Starost concurred, 'he has no right to trade, that is clear; we have been guilty in this, Brother Abram, but it shall be put right, you shall be satisfied, brother.' And Ivan was informed that he must trade no more.

'But what about my stock?' asked Ivan.

'That, dear Brother Ivan, must be even as you please. If it seems good to you to drive it back to Ruchee, do so, we cannot forbid you. But Abram Danielovitch is right, he pays the village for a monopoly, and you were wrong to set up a shop in opposition. Let us hope that

he will not claim a fine from you, Brother Ivan, for that might happen, if it were God's will !'

So Ivan harnessed his horse and took his ill-fated goods back to Ruchee, where the trader refused to give him more than half-price for his stuff.

Ivan returned to the village with his capital reduced to one-third its original amount, and spent the morning standing outside his cottage door, abusing at the top of his voice, in the approved manner of the Russian peasant, all the tribes of Israel in general, and Abram in particular ; the Starost, all his neighbours, their wives and families, and things in general.

Abram Danielovitch heard him, and made a note of the circumstance, visiting it upon the unfortunate Ivan very soon after by sending in a claim for fifty roubles compensation for the breach of contract involved in setting up an opposition shop. The peasants in conclave considered the matter, and awarded the full amount to Abram as against Ivan individually.

'But I set up the shop by your instructions,' protested Ivan, 'and lost heavily by it !'

'That, brother, is not our fault,' replied the Starost ; 'the shop was yours, and the risk of

trading and other risks were yours and not ours.'

The end of it was that Ivan had to pay. He had but twenty roubles in ready cash, and no prospect of more until after harvest-time, so he remained in Abram's debt, and Abram was glad, for he knew that he could now put the screw on when desirable.

The Jew was, at first, very popular with the peasantry. He had set apart one large room for 'assemblies,' and here his male customers would congregate of an evening to smoke their pipes and discuss the prospects of the crops. Some would go to make their supper of black bread and herring, the Jew occasionally treating his friends to a gratuitous glass of vodka.

Abram was useful to the peasants in many ways. He was ever ready to make a sporting offer for the purchase of their future crops, and to advance money on the transaction. Moreover, he took over for a consideration the sole right of shooting over the peasants' lands, for Abram was a bit of a sportsman and loved to get his gun off at a sitting bird or hare, though he eschewed those that flew or ran. Now Ivan was also a sportsman, and loved to take out his old single

barrel muzzle-loader in the hopes of finding a covey of willow-grouse sitting close, and which would allow of a family shot being brought off with comparative certainty and a due regard for economy in powder and shot. Therefore, on the fifteenth of July, the day on which shooting commences in Russia, he was out with his gun and old dog, as he had been accustomed to sally forth on this day ever since he could remember, before the days of Abram and the sale of communal shooting rights. Neither the one nor the other was going to stop his sport, Ivan had boasted, whenever he happened to feel inclined to shoot.

The Jew was out also with his assistant and two half-breed setter dogs; and seeing Ivan prowling about with his gun, ordered him home, explaining that he alone now enjoyed the right of shooting over the village lands. By way of reply, Ivan, who loathed Abram ever since the affair of the fine (half of which was still unpaid), raised his gun and shot one of the dogs dead, shouting as he did so that if the Jew were properly served he should be treated in the same way, for that Jews were, if anything, worse than dogs and ought to be shot down whenever met with. White with rage Abram returned to the village and in-

formed the Starost of Ivan's action and threat. Ivan was summoned before the Council, confronted with the Jew, and asked for his version of the matter.

'My version, brother?' said Ivan; 'my version is that I deserve punishment for shooting an innocent dog instead of an accursed Jew. I ought to have shot the Jew and spared the dog, but I hope God will pardon me!' Whatever secret leaning the members of the Council may have felt for Ivan, they were all by this time so deeply involved in debt to Abram Danielovitch that they dared not show their sympathy if they felt it. Ivan was condemned to twenty-five blows of the knout, which were then and there administered. At the same time the Jew obtained judgment against the unfortunate man for immediate payment of the unpaid portion of the ancient fine, together with interest for nine months; in default, Abram was to have the right to cut and sell Ivan's standing crops, reserving to himself the full amount due to him, and handing over the balance, if any, to Ivan.

On being released from the thongs which had served to bind him during his punishment, Ivan staggered from the room, and into the dusty road, a ruined and disgraced, but

also a desperate, man. That evening he disappeared from the village and for many a day was seen no more, whether at Deviatko or elsewhere. As a matter of fact he went to St. Petersburg, where he soon became a recruit in the great army of the Discontented.

Ivan was an easy capture for the propagandists. He fell, so to say, like a ripe fruit into their mouths. He had been abominably treated by Destiny, and made no secret among his new associates of the fact that he possessed a grievance. Men like Ivan are a godsend to the agents of the extreme party. These people soon marked him out at his work at the grain wharves at Podnefsky, and studied him. They saw that he was a sufferer of wrong, real or imaginary, and one of the brooding kind, and it was not long before they made friends with him, and began to instil their own ideas into his head. They found him an apt pupil indeed, and one who held the moderate intelligence he possessed entirely at their disposal, to be moulded as they willed. They had no difficulty in speedily convincing Ivan that Authority was the root of all evil, the prime cause of every wrong, whether at Deviatko or elsewhere, and that before things could be righted in the country, rivers of blood

must flow in St. Petersburg, and in all the large towns of the Empire.

In his capacity of all things to all men, Pavlof made friends, after a fashion, with this Ivan Zaitzoff. That is, he argued with him, being in total disagreement with the policy of violence which Ivan and his friends advocated, and befriended him as best he could when opportunity offered.

It was written in the book of Destiny that these two men should have certain dealings one with the other at a critical moment still lying hidden in the lap of the gods.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE day as Pavlof walked homeward after business he was startled by meeting an individual whose face and figure he recognised instantly ; so startled was he, indeed, that for the moment he forgot that the old man whom he had suddenly encountered, belonged to a former period of existence, and that he ought, of course, to have vanished before he should be recognised, instead of—in the agitation of the moment—revealing himself.

It was Father Gavril, his wife's father, but so changed and aged, that, gazing more closely upon him presently, Pavlof was surprised that he should have recognised him.

They met in one of the ' Lines ' of the Vassili Ostrof, streets which run in rectangular formation and are numbered instead of named.

The old priest started and seemed as though he would turn and flee, but apparently it occurred to him that since Pavlof was dead and eaten long since by a bear, this must be a stranger accidentally though closely resemb-

ling him. He therefore faced him, still panting with the terror of the moment, his eyes looking startled and frightened.

‘How like!’ he muttered. ‘Pardon, sir, I mistook you for one who is dead—the sudden shock startled me—you resemble my friend very closely.’

‘Father Gavril,’ said Pavlof, ‘you have no reason to fear me; I am Volodia Pavlof. I did not die but disappeared for Matrona’s sake, seeing that a mistake had been made and she did not want me.’

‘No, no, it is not Pavlof, you are a stranger; you wish me to make disclosures to you under pretence of being Volodia Pavlof, in order that you may destroy me.’

‘Disclosures? I know not what you mean, Father; what has happened? To what do you refer?’

‘If you were the real Volodia I would tell you many things, ay, and thank God for the opportunity; you should be my confessor—ha, ha! and I a priest—a good joke that! But how like you are to Volodia!’

‘But I am Volodia; how shall I assure you of it? Listen, your daughter is Matrona, whom I married in the winter, last year; your wife is Marfa Andréevna; in the village

of Karapsin is your church ; the name of the Starost is Bestuchef ; the shop is run by one Shadrine, who——’

The two men were walking together towards the quay ; the street contained its usual complement of foot passengers and droshkas. At the name of Shadrine, Father Gavril uttered an exclamation which was almost a yell, and which attracted the attention of all who were within hearing, causing them to look up in surprise at the mad-looking old man and his companion.

‘ Shadrine ! ’ exclaimed the priest. ‘ Ah, the villain, the animal ! it is to him that all our trouble is due, to whom—stay, let me look well at you—yes, you certainly look like Volodia Pavlof, my son-in-law ; if you are indeed alive, why did you leave your wife to be disgraced and ruined in the sight of God and man, and last of all—oh, my God ! That I should be alive to see this day of misery and disgrace ! ’

Volodia listened in rising anxiety and alarm. Was the old man mad, or had some tragedy happened at the village ? Pavlof had heard no news of the place since his disappearance ; he had taken for granted that his wife had married her first love as he had intended that she

should ; better that than the disgrace of the former position of parties, the result of his marriage which had been a mistake from beginning to end.

‘ Come with me, Father, to my lodging,’ he now suggested. ‘ You are suffering from excitement. You shall rest awhile and drink some tea, and you shall tell me at your leisure anything that may be upon your mind.’

‘ If you will swear by your Saint that you are Volodia Pavlof,’ the priest raved, ‘ I will come ; if you are deceiving me and are a spy, you shall be for ever cursed, you and your children——’

‘ *Vzdor*, Father, it is nonsense ; can you not see that I am Volodia and no other ? Let us go, I am no spy ; how should I have known all that I told you if I were not Volodia ?’

The old man seemed to become convinced ; ‘ Well,’ he said, ‘ come then——’

Over a brew of tea, and in the quiet and comfort of Pavlof’s room, Father Gavril seemed to find, for the time being, a measure of peace.

‘ Thanks be to the Most Holy,’ he said, ‘ that I have found you, Volodia ; in the village there is none to whom I can speak my heart or of whom I can ask counsel ; I dare not speak to my wife.’

‘When you are rested,’ said Pavlof, ‘if you wish it I will listen, and you shall tell me all that you desire to say.’

‘Who knows,’ said the miserable old man, ‘whether you will not curse me and perhaps strike me to the earth——’

Pavlof did his best to reassure the sufferer, little dreaming how terrible a tale he had to unfold, and presently the priest began.

Gradually, from among a maze of disjointed sentences and exclamations, there shaped itself a connected tale, and Pavlof learned step by step of Shadrine’s treachery, of Matrona’s disgrace in the village, and of the priest’s fierce anger against her betrayer. He told the story of his own crime without much emotion, failing, so it seemed to Pavlof, to appreciate the horror of the incident. Then he described the coming of Senka Harkof and his quarrel with Matrona and subsequent threats. Lastly, he narrated the final development of the miserable story.

Senka Harkof had, it seemed, made good his threat of suggesting to the police that an inquiry ought to be held concerning Shadrine’s disappearance. The man, he explained, had been the unfaithful lover of a young woman in the village, who had been heard to threaten him. Shortly after this threat he had dis-

appeared. At the village of Ostrof nothing was known of him since his last visit to the daughter of the trader there, with whom he had been on the best terms.

The police held an inquiry. Search was made for the man's body, in case he should have been murdered. It was soon found, the old well being naturally one of the first places examined. Then Matrona was arrested and 'tried.' There were many witnesses to speak of her treatment at Shadrine's hands, many excuses made for her in case the Court should be inclined to find against her. The old priest himself attended the trial and harangued the Court. 'Why am I not suspected as soon as my daughter?' he had shouted at the judge. 'Am I not concerned in my daughter's honour equally with herself? Accuse me rather than her; I swear she is innocent.' 'That is for us to say,' the judge told him; 'for the rest, stand down and go home; return if you will when you are sober.'

Then Matrona was convicted and sentenced to deportation to Siberia; they had carried her away forthwith—this was a week ago—Father Gavril had followed her to St. Petersburg and had not returned to the village; he would never return, he ended; the place was a hell

to him, his wife suspected him, he could see it.

Pavlof had listened, aghast with simple horror. So terrible was the priest's tale that he knew not whether to believe it or to regard it as the irresponsible raving of an alcoholic maniac. He questioned the old man, but could find no flaw in his narrative.

'I have told you the truth,' he said. 'Why should I lie? I am not mad to-day, though mad I have been, and mad I should be if I were to return to that place. For the love of God, Volodia, advise me; what shall I do?'

'If your tale is true,' said Pavlof, 'there is only one course; you must confess, and Matrona must be brought back; she is innocent.'

'But the disgrace—the horror—I am an Orthodox Priest—think how such a tale may injure the religion of Christ. I dare not bring so much shame upon our Holy Orthodox Church.'

'It is the only way. Churches survive though priests are occasionally found unworthy. It is the only way, Father; consider, for yourself; Matrona is innocent, yet you are allowing her to suffer—the innocent for the guilty. I say there is no other way.'

CHAPTER XV

FATHER GAVRIL sat and trembled in his chair. 'I would and yet I dare not,' he muttered. 'It is not that I fear the punishment; the darkest dungeon of Siberia would be better than the hell in which I have lived since the day of my crime; but I dare not bring odium upon the Church.'

'Let the Church look after itself,' said Pavlof; 'our first duty is to set Matrona free, who is innocent——'

'Yes, yes, poor Matrona, my poor little girl; but what will become of her if she returns? In the village she will be spurned by all and insulted; moreover, how will she live? Is she not better where she is?'

'First she must be justified, that is her due. Afterwards I will support her, that is her due also. I see now that I did wrong to leave her, though I did it for her happiness, as I supposed. Come, let us go to the police office; you shall give yourself up immediately; until you have done this you cannot have peace.'

The miserable old man sat and shuddered for five minutes without speaking; doubtless he weighed the matter over once again.

‘Well, I will come,’ he said suddenly, ‘yes, let us go quickly while I am in the mood. I thank God that I found you, Volodia. Have you any vodka in the house? Let me hearten myself before I go, I have had none to-day, I have no money.’

‘I have no vodka, nor would I give it if I had. It is the vodka that has ruined you. Come, we will talk no more, but go.’

The two men climbed into a droshka and set out for the nearest *Oochastok*, or police office; now that he had made up his mind to make a confession the old man could not be driven fast enough to his destination; he urged the driver every moment to whip up his horse. At the station his deposition was taken down; the policeman in charge then fetched his chief, who read over the statement.

‘This is nonsense,’ he said; ‘if it is as you say and the woman has been tried and condemned, it is not likely that the Court will reconsider the case. You are an old man and not likely to live long, if one may judge from appearances; it is as easy for you to die in

Siberia as here, but for your daughter it would be more profitable to return, therefore you would change places with her.'

'But I tell you that I am the delinquent, not she; it was I that killed the man, not she; I will swear to it before God and His Saints; I would——'

The pristaf laughed. 'All this is so easy, supposing that it is as I say. The Court is almost sure to take my view. The woman has been tried. She would not have been condemned unless she had been found guilty; cases already judged cannot be brought up for reconsideration; you will find that so the matter will end. I will, however, report. That you, a priest of the Orthodox Church, should desire to place yourself in the position of a self-confessed murderer is to me very surprising. I will not place you in custody—what, in the garb of a priest? God forbid! Return in three days, by that time I may hear from the Court.'

The priest protested, grew angry and stormed, became hysterical and wept, entreated, called Heaven to witness; Pavlof argued and protested also, but the official merely replied that he had nothing to add to what he had said.

'No statement can be accepted here without

proof,' he said. 'If a Court has decided that certain things were done by this person or that, it is not sufficient for you to make an assertion that the same acts were performed by some other person not accused ; you must first prove that the decision of the Court was wrong.'

'At least detain me until you have heard from the judges who tried my daughter,' said the priest ; but the official was obdurate and refused to budge from the position he had taken up.

During those three days of waiting, Pavlof, in compliance with the entreaties of the old man, who remained with him as his guest, locked him up each morning when he went out to his work.

'I cannot trust myself,' Father Gavril explained. 'At this moment I feel that peace may only be secured by atonement ; but the moment might come when fear assailed me, the fear of bringing shame upon the Holy Orthodox Church, and then I should escape from you and perhaps return no more.'

At the end of three days they returned together to the police office.

'It is as I said,' the pristaf explained. 'My report is returned to me—here it is, marked, as you may see, at the margin with the words

“The case is finished—reconsideration impossible.”

The pristaf did not mention the fact, but he had sent a duplicate report to the Holy Synod, from which august body he had received a reply as clear and concise as it was prompt: ‘Quash the confession. That a priest of the Orthodox Church of Russia should have been permitted to make such a statement is intolerable; let him be watched and if necessary removed to the Mad House.’

‘Keep him in safety until his madness is over,’ said the pristaf; ‘it is evident that grief has for the time being unhinged his reason.’

Pavlof was not loth to do the unfortunate old man this service. He did not yet despair of inducing the Court to accept his confession, or at any rate to re-try the case. He would move heaven and earth to bring this about. Doubtless the old man was mad, and therefore not to be held altogether answerable for his crime. At any rate he himself, having made the fatal mistake of deserting his wife and thus thoughtlessly abandoning her to the mercies of a scoundrel like Shadrine, was in a manner responsible for all the trouble which had fallen both upon herself and her father.

One evening, a day or two after the failure of

the police court, he left the priest safely in his bed, depressed and ill, and journeyed after sunset to Karapsin, in order to do what he could to comfort and reassure Matrona's unfortunate mother, deserted by her husband, her daughter torn from her and carried away Heaven knew whither, into Siberia.

When he had succeeded in assuring the frightened old lady that he was no ghost but her son-in-law, alive and substantial, he made known to her that her husband was in safe keeping and that he himself should not rest until Matrona had been restored to liberty. Matrona, he assured her, was innocent. He did not consider it necessary to inform her who was the guilty one, it was obvious that the poor old woman was well aware of the identity of the murderer.

His visit soothed her; the ten rouble note which he left behind him relieved her of present embarrassments; he bequeathed to her a measure of peace and hope, both of which had been absent from her poor heart for many days.

But when, in the early morning, he reached his modest lodging in the Tushkof Lane, expecting to find the old priest safely asleep in bed, where he had left him but a few hours before, he found instead, that his prisoner-guest

had departed. A bottle of vodka, of which he had somehow possessed himself, and which he had completely emptied, lay upon the bed—the only tangible legacy left behind him.

Father Gavril had disappeared; he had gone, presumably in the darkness of night; no one had seen him, neither the *dvornik* at the gate, nor the policeman at the corner of the street had noticed him. He had simply gone, and Volodia could find no trace of him.

CHAPTER XVI

PAVLOF lost no time in visiting the Department of Justice, where at least he expected to receive information of Matrona's whereabouts. Doubtless she had been 'deported,' but to what part of Russia or Siberia? It was important to know this much even though with the disappearance of Father Gavril had disappeared also the possibility of obtaining her release. There were other things in his mind concerning his wife and her infamous treatment—a heavy sense of responsibility with regard to her had suddenly dumped itself down in his heart and had come to stay. Hitherto she and her affairs had worried him but little, for he had believed that as she had chosen her destiny in life so it had shaped itself; but now it was different.

At the Department of Justice he was frankly laughed at.

'If we were to supply such information to all who ask for it, we should be obliged to run a Bureau for the purpose,' said a clerk, more friendly inclined than the rest. 'Still, as you

seem somewhat upset about it, tell me the chief facts of the affair, and I may be able to give you general information applicable to the case.'

'She was accused of murder,' said Pavlof; 'it was a faked-up accusation—she is innocent.'

'Ah! they all say that, you see. Who was murdered—a lover?'

'Yes, as it happens. But I can produce the murderer, or rather——' Pavlof stopped in some confusion.

The clerk laughed. 'Or rather, you have suspicions of some person who is not to be found, is that it?'

'He has certainly disappeared for the moment, but——'

'But even though he reappeared, my friend, that would be useless for your purpose. It is a *chose jugée* and will not be reopened. You desire to know her whereabouts. If it is a case of murder, I think I may tell you with comparative confidence that she is or will soon be in the Alexandrofsky prison at Irkutsk, unless she is at Saghalien. There she will remain for two or four years, according to her conduct while in custody. Afterwards she will be liberated and permitted to live as a colonist in Siberia, but not to return to Russia. Most

of them marry and settle as traders in the towns or as farmers in the country. There, I have told you all I can, and much more than is told to most inquirers. If you are a wise man you will let her be; if you are a fool you will follow the woman and wait until she is set free. I guess that you are the other lover, he for whose sake the first one was murdered.' The clerk laughed pleasantly at his own penetration. 'Have I guessed correctly?'

'If I were to assure you of my right to demand details, would you look up the case and supply them?' asked Pavlof.

'My dear sir, you use expressions which are not recognised here; "right"—"demand"—we do not know the meaning of the words. As for details, they are not to be had. It is possible that they might be forthcoming on the spot; we know nothing here. She is a convict, one of a gang—*et voilà tout!*'

Pavlof retired from that office more than ever incensed against the governing classes of his unhappy country. At every turn, at every contact which he had experienced with officialism, he had become more and more convinced of a fact which had at first greatly surprised him, but which he had now begun to attribute to the system which had produced the pheno-

menon; namely, that charming and lovable though the individual Russian might be so long as he held no office under Government, yet no sooner does he become an official, whether in the humble capacity of an *ooriadnik* in the village, a junior clerk in a Department, or in any branch whatever of officialdom, than the tyrannous taint of the system creeps insidiously into his soul, and he is at once the bully, the self-seeker, the embryo-bureaucrat, the incipient germ which will develop presently into that corrupt and heartless and brutal creature of bureaucracy, the Russian functionary.

He walked down the Nefsky, angry and depressed and disappointed, and at the corner of the Gostinny Dvor, he ran up against one Platonof, who stood and watched the stream of passers-by with an expression upon his face which was not suggestive of admiration or love for his fellow-creatures as exemplified in the procession of humanity now passing before his eyes.

‘Stand a minute or two with me here and watch,’ said Platonof. ‘Devil take it! I ought to set up as a walking directory and guide to the list of those whom we should be better without. See, I will tell you the names of some of those who pass by. Nearly every horse

with a long tail is dragging one of the "not-wanted"; this class reveals itself by growing its horses' tails long and sweeping—it is a curious fact, but true. There goes Vinogradof, the contractor who is providing our army in Manchuria with boots. The soles are made of paper, and that is where his profit comes in, which profit he shares with an august personage of great dignity and standing, who shall be nameless, because I see that we are being watched. Do you see the little man leaning languidly against the lamppost? That is a spy. I know him—Filipof is his name.' At the word the little man referred to started round. Platonof bowed politely. 'A fine day, Monsieur Filipof,' he said, 'and the atmosphere wonderfully clear; sounds travel this morning with remarkable accuracy.'

The small man did not reply; he shrugged his shoulders as though he would convey that he could make nothing of the remark, and considered that the stranger must be either drunk or demented. He moved a step or two further away.

'The little devil has ears like a lynx,' laughed Platonof. 'We know one another well; he is not hunting me to-day, or we should not see him here in the open. There goes Morosof, the

richest man in Moscow. Did you hear of his reply to the Grand Duke Apollon the other day? The Grand Duke summoned a dozen of the rich manufacturers of Moscow, in order to protest that their subscriptions to the Red Cross Society funds were quite unworthy of their standing in the world of wealth. Said Morosof, "We might subscribe more liberally, your Imperial Highness, if we knew that our money would travel all the way to the East."

"What do you imply by that?" said Apollon, red as a turkey-cock.

"Only that we should like to be represented upon the committee," said Morosof. "There are rumours that some of the money has lost its way."

'The Grand Duke stormed and fumed, and spoke of huge fines, of imprisonments, perhaps of Siberia and heaven only knows what else—the usual gamut. Then Morosof replied that in any such event he would close every one of his mills—which feed half Moscow—whereupon the Grand Duke dismissed the deputation, and no more was heard either of the Red Cross Society or of the knout or Siberia. There goes a very big man—doubtless you are aware of his name. Yes, the Grand Duke Poseidon. He is growing very rich, they say. Whenever a

new ship is built he grows a little richer, or a good deal. It has proved a better business than the concessions in Corea and Manchuria—hey? Bezobrazof is not quite so high in the favour of The Family to-day. There goes a beautiful woman—fair and frail!’

‘Which? The lady in the *calèche*? Why, that is Nathalie Oodine!’

‘Maybe; I do not know her name. She is mistress to the Grand Duke Maximilian; more than that I neither know nor care to know.’

‘Nevertheless a little more you shall know,’ said Pavlof, turning furiously upon his companion, so furiously that Platonof started back in alarm and wonder; ‘and that is that you have uttered the basest of calumnies. Mlle. Oodine is the best and purest of women. She is a dear friend of mine and a benefactor. You dare too much to speak thus, Platonof.’

Platonof was sincerely grieved. ‘My dear man,’ he said, ‘I apologise most humbly; I had no idea she was a friend of yours. Doubtless you know the truth, while I speak but hearsay. It is generally believed that—that it is as I said; but I will contradict the report.’

‘It is the least you can do. The Grand Duke is an acquaintance, I admit. I suppose that no member of his family can be seen with a woman

without such reports being spread ; it is the natural consequence of their evil reputation.'

'Well, Maximilian is the best of an indifferent company,' said Platonof. 'I should scarcely be able to convince myself that what you say is true had it been any other.' Platonof spoke politely, but it is doubtful whether he went away so entirely convinced as he pretended.

The incident angered Pavlof, and he remained no longer with Platonof. The events of the morning had contributed to his sense of the general rottenness of affairs in Russia. Were Platonof's stories of the Red Cross funds, of the Grand Duke Poseidon's pickings out of ship-building, of the contractor whose despicable profit-making was shared by another august personage—were all these stories true ?

If so, God help Russia !

CHAPTER XVII

It so happened that only a few days after Pavlof's conversation with Platonof, when the two men had stood at a corner in the Nefsky and watched the crowds of fashionable and poor folk that for ever flowed along that wonderful river of humanity, he encountered the Grand Duke Maximilian.

This was again in Nathalie's salon. Pavlof visited her regularly on Thursday evenings, on which day he was expected. This time he found his Imperial Highness, but not Nathalie.

Maximilian greeted him with a laugh. 'My double again,' he said. 'Nay, do not withdraw; let us converse, as old acquaintances should. Does the world treat you well?'

It suddenly occurred to Pavlof that here was possibly an opportunity to obtain a release for Matrona. He returned into the room.

'Your Imperial Highness has—has occasionally done me a kindness,' he faltered. 'Dare I beseech you to grant me a very special favour?'

‘That depends,’ laughed Maximilian; ‘at any rate, I will listen.’

Pavlof told the story of Matrona’s treatment by Shadrine, which seemed to amuse his Imperial Highness, and of the murder of her lover, at which he assumed a graver expression, and of Matrona’s condemnation, when he looked benevolently shocked.

‘She is innocent and must be released,’ continued Pavlof. ‘It is not necessary that I should name the murderer, but she is innocent.’

‘And you desire me to interpose? No, my friend; not even if she had proved herself the virtuous wife whom our little Volodia Pavlof deserved. It is a *chose jugée*; let her be. Moreover, reading between the lines of your story, I guess who is the murderer. Supposing that your assumption is right, it would not do to bring disgrace upon the Church; the people must not see such things. Let the woman be.’

‘But, Highness, she is innocent——’

‘Comparatively so, perhaps. Yet she was heard to threaten this man. The woman is better where she is. The outcome of the affair is not so bad; let it be. Why should you be so concerned for her release? Is it your intention to come to life again, in order that you may claim your wife now that the other has

repudiated her? You take the women too seriously, my friend.'

Pavlof, disgusted with the cynicism of the Grand Duke, said no more upon the subject; he bowed, and was about to depart.

'Do not go,' said Maximilian, stopping him a second time. 'Do you take it amiss, my friend, that I betray an interest in your welfare? If not, I would offer you a piece of advice.'

'I am at your Highness's pleasure.'

'Well, it is this. I am informed by Madame, whose kindness, I trust, you appreciate, that you are constantly to be seen in bad company.'

An intoxicating desire came into Pavlof's mind to reply that at this moment, at any rate, there was no one to see, but he resisted the delightful inclination, and merely inquired what was meant by 'bad company.'

'That of suspected men—agitators, revolutionists, dangerous persons of that kind,' his Highness explained.

'They are not dangerous to me, Highness,' said Pavlof.

'Pardon me, highly dangerous. In this city a man may be arrested for no other reason than having associated with this bad character or that. The known delinquent himself

is purposely left free, in order that it may be discovered by the police who are the innocents in process of contamination.'

'What a most damnable trick,' said Pavlof angrily. 'At any rate, I thank your Highness for warning me. If I am to be arrested, however, arrested I must be, for I shall not break with a single acquaintance at the bidding of authority.'

'Volodia, I ask you as a favour,' said the Grand Duke with apparent emotion, 'to avoid trouble with the police.'

Pavlof felt touched by Maximilian's manner, which seemed to show a real interest in his welfare.

'Your Highness is truly kind——' he began, but the Grand Duke laughed and interrupted him.

'You are so abominably like me, you see,' he explained; 'I cannot afford to have the officials at the *oochastoks* making remarks upon the fact.'

Pavlof could not help laughing also, though he was angry. 'I apologise, Highness,' he said; 'I was nearly making a grave mistake. I was about to suspect you of possessing something in the nature of a heart.'

'As for that, I suffer from actual possession,

little as it may be believed. Joking apart, keep clear of the police courts at this time. Before long there is to be a battue; there is, it is thought, at present too much propagandism abroad. You might find yourself in a tight place. If you had another face I might help you when in trouble; seeing that you are you, I cannot.'

'Monseigneur, you are very frank to-night. May I be allowed to venture to be frank also? You have betrayed interest in my welfare; I would prove that I have yours also at heart.'

'I do not see why we should not feel a natural interest in one another. Speak on.'

'This day I stood in the Nefsky with an acquaintance when Madame passed. May I repeat the remarks of my companion, whose information was, of course, based upon hearsay, and therefore not to be taken seriously, excepting as a warning of what mistakes may be made? Indicating Madame Oodine, who passed in her carriage, this man said, "There goes the mistress of his Imperial Highness Maximilian Petrovitch."'

The Grand Duke flushed red and looked hard at his companion. Then he burst out laughing.

‘Holy saints! how we are maligned by ignorant people. Will the masses never learn that we are patterns of the virtues and the moralities, we others! And what did you reply? Scathing words, I trust, of denial, of horror; you stood up for the honour and immaculate respectability of the Grands Seigneurs? Since you are privileged with the acquaintance of one of us, this was the least you could do.’

‘I denied the report,’ said Pavlof simply, ‘because I knew it to be untrue.’

‘You knew it—good; and you denied it—good again. My reputation is, I perceive, safe in your hands. But how came you to know so much?’

‘Your Highness must pardon me, but it was not your reputation for which I was concerned. For Madame’s it is otherwise. If my informant had been, not the acquaintance I spoke of, but your Imperial Highness himself, and you had assured me that it was as he declared, I should not have believed your Highness.’

Maximilian winced a little, but made a show of laughing. ‘I was right, my friend, when I said that you take the women too seriously,’ he replied. ‘Truly you are an extraordinary person, Volodia, and your mother must have

been a simple-minded woman indeed. In certain characteristics you do not favour your father.'

Pavlof bowed. 'I trust I am grateful to Providence for all its mercies,' he said, and again the Grand Duke laughed heartily, while the younger man escaped at last from the room and went his way.

His Imperial Highness continued to smile as he walked up and down Nathalie's handsome reception-room.

'Doubtless it is for my sins,' he murmured, 'that I must give to an Anton my name and privileges, and withhold even recognition from this one. If this boy were one of us—— But then if he were one of us,' Maximilian ended after a pause, 'he would not long remain as he is.'

When Nathalie arrived presently, she was not pleased to find his Imperial Highness instead of Volodia Pavlof; but this disappointment she took pains to conceal from Monseigneur, for Nathalie was well trained in the etiquette necessary in one's bearing towards men of his exalted rank, even though his Highness condescended to live upon intimate terms with her, and was very fond of her after his fashion.

CHAPTER XVIII

VOLODIA PAVLOF was surprised to receive a note from Nathalie during the morning of Friday, the day after that Thursday evening upon which he had found the Grand Duke at her house instead of Nathalie herself, when he had gone away without seeing her. Pavlof knew that Nathalie valued his weekly visits, and that she had grown fond enough of him to look forward to seeing him. He knew also that for him, too, these visits had become increasingly precious, and that he was, in fact, beginning to find Nathalie's presence necessary to his full happiness.

'Which being the case, it is time I broke with her before it is too late,' Pavlof had already assured himself many times; yet the visits had continued.

In the letter now received Nathalie begged Volodia to come and see her. 'I have a very important matter to discuss,' she wrote; and of course Pavlof repaired to her house as soon as business hours were over.

He found Nathalie in a mood which was new to him. He was accustomed to see her calm and kind, with scarcely any of that nervous excitability so common among Russian ladies of all ages. But to-day she was flushed and agitated, and her eyes looked as though she had cried at some not very distant period.

Pavlof was surprised and concerned.

‘Something has gone wrong,’ he said at once ; ‘what is it, Nathalie?’

‘All—everything is wrong. We meet for the last time, Volodia. Listen. Last night you came—his Highness was here, and you conversed——’

‘Nathalie! He did not tell you—he would not dare.’

‘He told me. I have broken with him. I am ashamed, Volodia; I cannot look you in the face.’

‘No wonder that you are ashamed.’

‘So ashamed that I will see him no more, and see you no more.’

‘Nathalie! But——’

‘Volodia, you do not understand. Yesterday, in the simplicity of your good heart, you stood forward as champion for my good name. For this I shall bless you to my dying day; but I have no good name. Since the day when I

first met Maximilian Petrovitch—do you understand? Alas! I was not worthy that you should stand up in defence of my honour.'

'You mean,' Pavlof stammered, white as paper, 'that he—that the Grand Duke——'

'Yes—yes; I thought you must have seen, and that you pitied, you with your great heart that is like God's—only last night I learned that you believed me other than I am. We must part, Volodia. All this night I have wept, because I love you; see, I am not ashamed to own it—but part we must. After this day I shall see you no more.'

'Wait, Nathalie, I must have time to think,' he groaned; 'it is difficult to take in so much. When a Grand Duke woos a woman it is not, I suppose, as though the lover were an ordinary man. In the sight of God I know not how it may be, but in the eyes of man to be the mistress of a Grand Duke is different perhaps. You loved him, that I do not doubt. If one loves, that too is different. I know not what I say, Nathalie; I am confused. Yes, we had better part—there is nothing to gain by meeting. He will not permit you to break with him, do not think it, unless he has wearied of you, which I do not believe. You say that you have learned to love me, and, alas! I too

have learned love. But, besides the Grand Duke, there are many other things between us——’

‘There is my dishonour—that is enough. Even though you were ready to forget, I could not.’

‘It is not a question of forgetting. You are the Grand Duke’s. To break the connection would be good, but I think you will not find it possible, until he wishes it. I did not refer to that only. See now how, in our foolishness, we have cheated one another. We did not consider that love might come to us, and now it is too late. You the mistress of a Grand Duke, and I the husband of a woman whom I thought——’

‘A husband! you? Volodia, is all this a dream that we are passing through, you and I? You a husband, and never to have told me!’

‘It is as I say. We have cheated one another, meaning no harm, but love has come; and we now find, that in withholding confidence at the first, we have unwittingly sinned against one another. Yes, I was married in my old life, but I quickly left my wife, because I found she had a lover, one who was her lover before I came to spoil their happiness. I meant well

by her, desiring that she should have the man for whom she sorrowed and sinned. So as Pavlof I died, and being in great need of a passport, found you, who befriended me. In my old life I was dead, therefore I withheld my secret from you; what had my old existence to do with you? But I found that one cannot die to one's responsibilities. My wife and her lover quarrelled. She is still my wife—not his; he is dead, and she is in Siberia.'

Nathalie—to his surprise—broke into hysterical laughter.

'Mon Dieu!' she cried, half laughing, half crying; 'it is like you to place our faults upon a level—I, who have lost honour and 'self-respect as mistress to a Grand Seigneur, whom I loved, certainly, at the beginning, but whom I love no longer; you, who sacrificed happiness for the sake of another who deceived and injured you, and now, when misfortune has overtaken her, speak of responsibility! I am the sinner—you the saint; yet you speak of us as equals in wronging one another. Are you saint enough to seek out this faithless wife of yours and take her back to your bosom? Shall I exert myself to obtain a pardon for her?'

Nathalie laughed and cried as she spoke; but Volodia answered calmly.

‘Yes, I would seek her out if I knew where to find her. As for pardon for her, I have already informed the authorities that she is innocent; I even produced the guilty man—yet they will not move.’

‘And you would have taken her back to your heart?’

‘No, not to my heart; I think I should not live with her; but for her misfortunes I am responsible, and it is my duty to see that she is freed. It is too soon to think beyond that.’

‘Listen, Volodia.’ Nathalie’s face was flushed with agitation; she neither cried nor laughed now, but spoke, as it seemed, seriously. ‘Why should we two, who love one another, live in misery? You are more saint than man, but too much saint becomes fool. You are a Quixote in this matter, but if you are set upon it, I will obtain a pardon for the woman, and she shall return to her village. This will cost me something, and in return you shall forgive me the sin which I have confessed. I shall afterwards leave this house, and the Grand Duke shall not find me; but surely you and I——’ Volodia interrupted.

‘Nathalie, you are mad; you know not what you say. I know the price you would pay for this pardon. It must be obtained through the

Grand Duke, your patron ; and until you have secured it you must remain under his protection. No, I will obtain it at less cost, if it is to be had. As for the rest of your suggestion, God forbid that I should pluck you out of one state of dishonour in order to set you in another.'

'You are determined, then, that we must part?'

'There is no other way. Have you money, or are you wholly dependent upon the Grand Duke?'

'I have plenty. I was left an orphan, and rich, but without protection.'

'Then you are the less blameworthy. Though we must, eventually, part, I will see you before I set out for Siberia. Send me your address when you have left this house ; though, if I do not go to Siberia, I think it would be better if I did not see you.'

'How easily you say it—you who speak of love.'

'Love, that should be the most precious gift of the gods, is for us a misfortune ; the sooner it is starved or forgotten, the happier for us. We cannot tell what may lie in the future, but for the present time it is so. By my foolishness I brought upon my life terrible disasters ; until I have set my wife right with the world, I can

have no peace. Until this last misfortune, I held that as wife she had no further claim upon me, but her punishment has opened my eyes. When you have considered the matter calmly, you too will see that I did not actually, as I thought, shake off my responsibilities when I left her to her lover.'

CHAPTER XIX

PAVEL PAVLOVITCH DOBROF was a very insignificant little man, and quite unworthy of mention in these records, being nothing more dignified than a retired butler, living upon a small pension generously provided by his late master. His claim to notice is this, that, returning to his modest little lodging one afternoon from his daily walk, he found lying at his door the figure of a man, apparently weak and ill and unable to speak, and dressed in the garb of a priest. This was Father Gavril, who had wandered penniless about the town, until he had accidentally stumbled to old Pavel's door, at which he had dropped exhausted. He could scarcely have chosen a more fortunate spot for his collapse, for there did not beat in all Russia a kinder heart than that of old Pavel Pavlovitch.

‘Holy St. Vladimir, equal to the Apostles!’ ejaculated the astonished old man. ‘What is this? a dying man—and a priest, too. What is

the matter, Father? Do you suffer, or is it only weakness?’

Father Gavril gasped faintly that he needed vodka.

‘Vodka? Alas, I have none; but there is tea—the kettle boils, listen. Can you rise? See, I will help you. You shall have tea and a piece of fish-pie. Sit in this chair, so. Why, how came you in this plight?’

Gavril offered no explanation. He gazed about the room, but said nothing; he drank some tea, however, and ate a piece of Pavel’s *koolyabaka*, which is a pie made of fish and rice and eggs—a very tasty dish. He felt revived, and sighed, and seemed to take more interest in his surroundings.

‘Where is your home?’ asked Pavel. ‘You collapsed from weakness, I think; did you lose your way?’

‘I have no home,’ said the priest; ‘I am a lost soul!’

‘Alas!’ thought old Pavel; ‘he is a God’s-man!’ by which he meant a lunatic. ‘This has not happened by accident.’ He crossed himself, and muttered something, glancing at the ikon in the corner.

‘If you are lost and cannot remember where you lived,’ he said aloud, ‘then you shall stay

with me here for a while until your memory returns. Only yesterday I was thinking how lonely it is to live by oneself, and I wished that I had a companion. You shall sleep in the bed, and I on the stove. The room is small, but large enough for two. See how God has answered my wish! I desired a companion, and you have come—and a priest, too!’

‘No, no!’ said Gavril, groaning; ‘not a priest. That is past and gone—long, long ago. I am a lost soul.’

‘Well, so be it, then; a lost soul that God will find and restore. You shall rest here, and I shall take care of you, and in time you shall be well and remember.’

‘Remember? Say, rather, “in time you shall forget.”’ Father Gavril’s head dropped upon his breast, and he said no more; presently he slept.

Pavel Pavlovitch went to his ikon and thanked God that this wonderful thing had happened to him. This God’s-man had been sent to him for a purpose; he was weary, and he should have rest; he was miserable, but Pavel would comfort him, so that in time he should smile; he was a lost soul, but by God’s help he should be enabled to find himself.

All that evening the priest spoke very little. He was too utterly weary to exert himself. He sat in his chair and looked straight before him. When supper-time came he ate the remains of the fish-pie, not noticing that Pavel had to content himself with black bread and salt. When invited to lie down upon the bed and sleep, he did so without question. Pavel mounted upon the top of the wide brick stove, and, spreading his old winter coat to lie upon, slept happily and contentedly.

In the morning Father Gavril was still in a silent mood. He only spoke when addressed, and then but in monosyllables.

Only once, half-way through the morning, when Pavel Pavlovitch sat busily stitching a cotton shirt which he was making for a neighbour, he was startled by an observation from his silent companion.

‘For God’s sake give me vodka!’ Gavril exclaimed.

‘But, dear brother, I have none,’ said Pavel apologetically. ‘I am not so rich that I can indulge myself in wine. Moreover, I have found that a man is better without it. You must pardon me that I have none to offer you, brother. Shall I light the samovar? Will you have tea?’

Gavril had tea and said no more. He took all that was given him as a matter of course, scarcely noticing what happened.

When Pavel left the house for his daily walk, the old man watched him away.

‘Do not fear to be left alone,’ said Pavel; ‘I shall soon return—in an hour. If you are hungry, there is bread on the shelf. Or lie on the bed, if you are weary. The room is yours as much as mine.’

When Pavel left the house Gavril sat still for a while, but presently, after listening at the door, he too left the room and departed.

Pavel was greatly upset to find his visitor gone. He blamed himself. ‘I was selfish and inconsiderate,’ he said; ‘I ought to have remained with him. He is sick and broken-hearted; naturally he would bear ill to be left alone. I ought to have thought of it.’

But in the evening, hearing a faltering step upon the pitch-dark stone staircase which formed the filthy and airless approach to the cheap little lodgings into which the house was subdivided, he went out upon the landing and encountered Father Gavril staggering upstairs. Old Pavel was not so simple but that he realised instantly that his visitor was very drunk.

‘Now I understand,’ he reflected. ‘My poor brother is doubly unfortunate. Now I understand why he called himself a lost soul. Enter, enter, and welcome, brother Gavril.’

Gavril said nothing, but staggered into the room and sat down. He held his head in his hands; from the outer pocket of his overcoat bulged the head of a vodka bottle. Pavel saw it and pulled it out. It was nearly empty.

‘Brother, this is your enemy; let me destroy it,’ said Pavel.

Gavril clutched at the bottle, muttering angrily, but Pavel was stronger and secured it. He took it out on the stairs and threw it into an unclean corner, where the broom and the swill-pail were unknown quantities, and where it fell in pieces among a heap of other rubbish.

‘Brother, if you have any money,’ Pavel entreated upon returning, ‘let me keep it for you; you are not fit to have it, it is not your fault. With me it shall be safe, and when you are well it shall be returned to you.’

Gavril considered a moment, then he put his hand in his pocket and produced a few kopeks, which he set down before Pavel without a word.

‘Already God is restoring you to yourself,’ exclaimed Pavel, much gratified. ‘See, I will put it in my own purse, and when you leave me you shall have it again. You shall eat my food with me so long as you are here; you have no need for money.’

‘You do not know how God hates me,’ said Gavril. ‘You only take me in because you do not know. I am a lost soul; each day I am farther and farther and yet farther from salvation.’

‘Not so, not so. Christ died for sinners, for you and for me and for all. It is sad that you should have lost patience, and have left the house when the Evil One prompted you to drink; but see, it is my fault, because I should not have left you. To-morrow we will go together or both stay in the house.’

But the fumes of the vodka had now taken effect, and Gavril understood no longer what was said to him. He fell into deep sleep, and Pavel Pavlovitch partially undressed him, and, by lifting and supporting and what not, contrived to get him upon the bed. Then he set to work once more upon the cotton shirts which he had been sewing for his neighbour, and for which he would receive a few kopeks remuneration.

‘I am glad of this work to-day,’ he murmured, ‘because now there are two mouths to feed. How lucky that Ignat Ignatich offered me these shirts to sew! Such things are not accidental.’

CHAPTER XX

PAVEL PAVLOVITCH finished the third of his cotton shirts before retiring to the top of his stove to sleep. It was ten o'clock when this was accomplished—a late hour for him, because sitting up meant lamp-oil, and that was an unnecessary expense.

But an extraordinary thing happened. For when, having finished his work, Pavel went to his drawer in order to replace the third shirt with the other two, which had been folded ready for delivery, he could only find one of the two. He searched the drawer and the other two drawers, and then all three over again, but in vain. His eye wandered into every corner of the room, faintly lit up by the small lamp that stood on the table, but he could see no shirt.

‘It is very strange! what could I have done with it?’ he murmured. ‘I felt sure I had placed it with the others. Well, to-morrow morning when it is light I shall find it.’

The morning came and the light with it,

but even by daylight Pavel could not find his lost shirt. He searched everywhere, but the shirt was not to be found. Pavel's eye fell upon Gavril's still sleeping form, and rested for a moment upon his face.

'I wonder,' he murmured, 'whether——'

For a minute he stood and pondered, then an expression of pain passed over his face. 'Shame upon me!' he muttered; 'it is a wicked thought; though even if it had been so, certainly a God's-man is not responsible for his actions. How should he know?'

'And the drink-craze added to his other misfortunes would render him the less to blame. But what do I do, speaking of blame and suspecting innocent persons, when the room is but half-searched?'

And Pavel began again and made a new and systematic search from floor to ceiling. While so engaged a querulous voice from the bed suddenly broke the silence.

'What are you looking for, Pavel Pavlovitch?' The two men had informed each other within the first hour of their acquaintance as to their respective names and patronymics; Russians invariably do so. Pavel looked up from his occupation with a guilty flush.

'Nothing, nothing, Gavril Ivanitch. I had

mislaid something, but it does not matter; it will turn up presently.'

'But what is it? Maybe I have seen the lost thing—what is it?'

'Oh, it is not worth mentioning, Gavril Ivanitch; it is just a cotton shirt, one of those upon which I have been working. It will turn up—it would be no great loss if it did not.'

'I will help you look for it,' said Gavril, his face scarlet with shame. To hide it he climbed under the bed, pretending to search for the missing garment, and remained there some little while, making a show of fumbling and peering about.

'Do not trouble, Gavril Ivanitch,' said Pavel, who very plainly saw the scarlet face of his visitor, and had quickly turned his back upon it. 'It is not a matter of consequence. Ignat Ignatich told me that he was in no hurry for the work.'

Gavril came out from under the bed and sat upon it, slowly putting on the clothes taken off at night. He said nothing. Throughout the tea-drinking he said not a word. He watched Pavel's face, but remained silent. Pavel spoke continuously and bracingly. He touched upon all manner of subjects, and laughed and told many stories of his service

with his old master, but Gavril only looked in his face and answered not a word, and so the day passed until the afternoon. Then Pavel said, 'I go for a walk, Gavril Ivanitch—will you come?'

Gavril shook his head. 'I am ill, Pavel Pavlovitch,' he said; 'my head aches, I cannot walk. Leave me here, but lock the door behind you.'

'Yes, yes; I understand,' said Pavel, 'I will lock it, my brother.' He went out and locked the door behind him, thanking God that Gavril had himself suggested it, because in that suggestion he thought he discerned that this poor soul which had been placed in his keeping was now in a state of grace.

Pavel took the two finished shirts to Ignat Ignatich, and received payment for the work done; the third, he said, Ignat should have to-morrow. With this money and a little added he bought material, which he took home to cut out and make up.

Gavril lay upon the bed, obviously ill. He coughed and fretted and slept but poorly at night, talking in his sleep far more than he had done during his waking hours. Pavel continually climbed down from his stove to minister to him.

In the morning he was no better. He lay

and watched Pavel as he cut out and stitched the shirt, but did not speak. He refused all food, but drank a little tea. In the afternoon Pavel went out and bought him a bottle of medicine, spending upon it the few kopeks which would otherwise have gone in food for his own supper.

During that night Gavril rallied a little, as it seemed. He called to Pavel, who came scrambling down from the stove to attend to him, ashamed to have been asleep and full of apologies and self-accusations. Gavril seemed to take no notice of what was said.

‘Put your ear close to my lips, Pavel Pavlovitch,’ he murmured; ‘I have something to say to you.’

‘Speak, dear Brother Gavril,’ said the other, bending close to him; ‘I am listening.’

‘That—that cotton shirt that was lost——’ said Gavril, and paused.

‘Oh, that! Of what consequence is one little shirt? How easy it was to replace it with another! See, it is finished already, or nearly so.’ Gavril took no notice.

‘That lost shirt——’ he repeated.

‘Yes, yes—I am listening.’

‘I was dying for vodka—the devil tempted me—I took it—and sold it.’

‘Think nothing of it, Brother Gavril,’ said Pavel Pavlovitch. ‘What is a little shirt—did not I say that the room and all that it contains were yours as much as mine?’

Gavril said no more.

Only once again he spoke. Towards morning he suddenly sat up in bed and called out aloud:—

‘Marfa,’ he said, ‘Marfa—it was I that did it—not Matrona. I have told them, but they will not believe——’ Soon after that he breathed his last breath.

Pavel Pavlovitch, full of pity for the dead man, went, as in duty bound, to give notice of his death to the police. At the office he was strictly interrogated, but could give no information as to the identity of the dead man.

‘But you have brought his papers?’ said the pristaf severely.

‘He had none—at any rate I could find none,’ said Pavel Pavlovitch.

Then the pristaf reprimanded him severely. ‘Do you not know,’ he said, ‘that it is unlawful to harbour strangers who are without papers? Detain this man, gorodovoy, until his assertions have been verified. Search the rooms for documents and return quickly.’

The police could find no documents, and since

they were unable to disprove Pavel's assertion that he took in the stranger for Christ's sake, because he was penniless and old, and had lost his memory, they were forced to accept it. This they did unwillingly and with obvious suspicion. Pavel Pavlovitch was sentenced to police supervision for a year. Moreover, he was condemned to pay for Father Gavril's burial, and, in order to defray this expense, he was obliged to utilise half the sum which he had set aside for his own funeral.

For all of which privileges Pavel Pavlovitch felt and expressed the most sincere and humble gratitude to the Almighty, because he had been accounted worthy to comfort in his last hours a poor lost soul who had no one else at hand to see him off to a happier world.

CHAPTER XXI

AMONG the workers in the cigarette factory from which Pavlof drew his employment and the salary which supported him, were certain men who, though working with the rest and giving no offence to their employers, were nevertheless each a centre of organised mischief to his fellow-operatives—agitators, in fact; men who had learned the craft of the cigarette-maker, as others of their society learned that of the cottonspinner or weaver, of the steel-worker, the shipbuilder, the sugar-refiner, and of every industry that employed operatives in the mills and works of St. Petersburg, in order that they might take employment among the *bona-fide* workmen, for the purpose of pushing their propaganda of revolt.

In Pavlof's factory the mill-hands had only lately obtained concessions from their employers, kind-hearted men with a thought for the comfort and happiness of their inferiors. The hours had been reduced from fourteen in the day to eleven and a half, out of which one

and a half hours were devoted, at midday, to the usual meal, with the sleep which invariably follows. On Saturdays the hours were eight only. The pay of the men had also been increased ; in fact, the operatives were at present well enough satisfied with their position. The same may be said of many of the cotton-mills in the district, where similar concessions had been made. In all these establishments the new-comers, those who had been sent in to sow discontent, found that they had taken in hand a more difficult enterprise than they had supposed.

‘Let us alone,’ said the true operatives ; ‘we are doing well enough, and our employers have done their best for us.’

‘Those who stand still go backward,’ said the agitators. ‘These capitalists must be allowed no peace until our lives have become as tolerable as their own. Eight hours a day is work enough for any man, and the pay must be largely increased, because we shall have more leisure to spend the money.’

‘That is a good theory and sounds very well,’ said the puzzled operatives ; ‘but one of our directors spoke to us when the last concession was made ; he explained that the works belong to shareholders who expect a return for their

investment. "We are paying them five per cent.," said he, "and they are not too well satisfied, for not long ago we paid them fourteen. This concession to you will cost them half their dividend. You see, therefore, that we are doing the utmost possible for you. You would not have us close the works? This we must do if we cannot make them pay." These are the very words of our director, who is an Englishman.'

'Ah, ah!' retaliated the agitators, 'an Englishman! Listen to that, brothers! You may be sure it is a lie. These Englishmen are squeezing their profits out of your labour in order that they may pay the Japanese for killing our soldiers. They pretend that they receive five per cent.; I tell you it is twenty-five that they receive. We know these things, we others! It is good to be gramatny, and know how to read and to calculate.'

'Nevertheless, leave us alone; the directors are not all Englishmen, some are Russians. They were all present; the Russians could have contradicted the Englishman, but they said, "Yes, yes, so it is, brothers," thus proving that he spoke truth. As for the English paying the Japonskys for killing our soldiers, we know nothing of such things; we do not understand

what is meant. Let the war stop, then no one need be killed. The directors pay us our wages, and do not treat us like dogs, as we hear some workmen are treated in the Government iron and steel works.'

So the agitators found their work difficult enough in the private factories, and therefore the delegates from the revolutionist parties outside were obliged to change their tactics. They altered their standpoint, making the attack from a basis of political rather than industrial grievances, and here they found plenty of soil ready for tilling.

'The laws,' the men were told, and this was true enough, 'make absolute slaves of the operatives; it is illegal for you to strike or to form trades-unions, as workmen in other countries can and do for the protection of their rights. Again, the authorities are altogether on the side of your employers and against you. This is all very well so long as you are well treated and well paid. But what if troubles arise? Who will see to your rights if you may not do so yourselves?'

'Our Father the Tsar,' some men were sure to reply to this. 'He has only to be told of our trouble and he will set it right!'—a statement which was invariably received

with loud laughter by the new apostles of agitation.

'The Tsar? Who will tell him? His advisers? They are paid by your capitalists to remain silent. The Tsar has only two eyes and two ears; he cannot see all things and learn all things for himself. Therefore, the liars who stand around him must see and hear for him, and they report only that which it pleases or profits them to report. You are forgotten, my brothers. The Tsar thinks of his army and his navy but not of you and me; for us he has no time.'

Volodia Pavlof had become by this time a well-known and much respected member of many and various circles of life in St. Petersburg. His friends among the working-classes liked and respected him because he was obviously sincere and as obviously reasonable. He never gave them headstrong counsels as, at this time, so many were ready and willing to do. Neither was he altogether in favour of the employers, though he argued that even capitalists must be treated with justice. The employers must not be frightened, he told his friends, into withdrawing their money from the factories, for what would become of the operatives if they did so? This was a new

argument for many of the men, who had never looked at matters in this light, and were probably entirely unaware that labour owes something to capital as well as capital to labour.

In so far as concerned the arguments against the employer, however, Volodia was on the whole opposed to the agitators. In regard to their campaign against the workmen's laws, he was altogether with them.

'Fight against your enemies,' he advised the men, 'but not against your friends. You will do far better if you treat with your employers direct in questions of wages and hours; once you persuade the bureaucrats to put their fingers in the pie, you'll find the pie spoiled. These men spoil all they touch.'

'Who then are our enemies?' some one asked, and Pavlof replied with a laugh, 'The muzzle and the chain and the spies and the laws by which men are forbidden to learn, these are our enemies.'

'If these are our enemies we must of course fight against them,' said a puzzled operative, scratching his head; 'but how is such a fight to be begun? The Tsar must be told, that is the first thing. Yet, Antonof says that the Tsar is so far away from us that he cannot be made to hear.'

‘The Tsar hears what he wishes and helps whom he desires,’ Volodia laughed. ‘Shout loud enough and he will hear. Whether he will come to our aid depends upon those who blow him this way and that. Perhaps Witte will say to him, “Tsar, listen; the poor workmen are calling to you; they live in dirt and misery and slavery; they cry for more freedom, for more knowledge, for happier conditions of existence; listen and help them; for you it is a simple matter to do this.” Then the Grand Duke Apollon, or perhaps Poseidon, or Nikifor will start up and cry, “Tsar, do not listen; this is revolt, thinly disguised; these men are *canaille*; they are little better than the brute beasts; they live well enough; do you not see whither this demand is trending? A little more freedom means a little more power; a little more learning means the knowledge to use that power; grant no reform to these people, for reform is the placing of a sword in their hands, which sword shall be used against autocracy.”’

Volodia’s hearers did not understand much of this.

‘Do you mean,’ they asked, ‘that the Tsar would be willing to help us if others did not advise him against us?’

‘He might. I do not know the Tsar’s mind. Certainly there are those about him who will not suffer him to do justice.’

‘Why, then, he must be told! Certainly our Little Father must be told that his children cry to him in vain because evil-minded men give him lying counsel. Cannot we, who are his children, approach him and give the lie to these liars?’

‘It is as difficult to approach the Tsar as it is to reach Heaven,’ Pavlof laughed, ‘excepting for those Archangels who stand for ever at his side. Between us and the Tsar, brother, there is a great sea.’

‘Nevertheless, if we cry loud enough perhaps he will hear and beckon us over,’ said one of the sanguine, of whom there were still at that moment tens of thousands in St. Petersburg; simple, loyal, ignorant peasants from the villages, tenacious of the old Russian feeling of confidence in the omnipotence and benign consideration of the Little Father. They remembered, perhaps, past famines and timely help received. Probably this help had then come either from the Zemsky authorities or from private benefactors, but the Tsar had invariably received the credit for it. They could not forget the tradition of ages, the pathetic

tradition that the Tsar is the father of his people and is certain to help them in the moment of emergency ; a beautiful tradition, which has survived on very little sustenance and in spite of many Ivans and Peters and Pauls, whose fathership for their people was mostly revealed in tyrannies and extortions and injustice of every kind ; a tradition which survived for hundreds of years, but which, alas ! has seen its last days in this present year of grace, unless indeed the Russian moujik is even more forgetful, or more forgiving, or even blinder than seems possible to believe.

CHAPTER XXII

AMONG Pavlof's acquaintances, apart from the operative class with whom he spent the greater portion of his leisure time, were many young journalists and writers, and these were perhaps at this time suffering more than their neighbours from the *saeva indignatio* of repression. They sighed for freedom of expression, for the right to discuss the affairs of the moment unchecked by authority. Absolute liberty of the press was, they knew, beyond the range of hope; but for the nation to be allowed to take reasonable counsel with itself upon its own affairs was surely not more than might be expected.

Of late the pressmen had been buoyed with hope; there had been indications that the meddling, muddling, stifling censor and his subs and committees were to be, to a certain extent, controlled. The Government had practically promised reform of the press laws. But almost in the moment of victory the Tsar had vacillated and once more those who had

tentatively anticipated a relaxation of severity, and had written and printed articles of more liberal tendency than would have been tolerated a little while ago, had been warned and threatened and in a few cases punished; and again the chilling finger of repression lay upon every page of the daily paper; comment had again become impossible or valueless, the building up of public opinion was postponed *sine die*.

Volodia went to tea with a young poet of his acquaintance, very youthful, very simple-minded, withal clever and wide awake to the tendency of the moment, to the strong breath of demand which moved at this time upon the face of the political waters. This man was Bibikof, who was, like many others, a believer in the Tsar, not so much as Tsar, because he knew well enough that there sit about the centre of power in Russia many influences which tend to render powerless autocracy itself, but rather as a man of the highest personal character, ready and anxious to grant to his faithful people every reform which should be proved to him to be necessary.

Little Bibikof was one of those who argued, like Pavlof's operative friends, that if the Tsar was so hedged about by officials opposed to

reform and dinning constantly into his ears the arguments of one side only, then he must somehow be approached by those of his people who could best place before him, humbly and reasonably, but eloquently, the arguments which bore upon their side of the questions at issue.

‘It should be a deputation containing representatives of all classes,’ Bibikof and others argued, ‘but the speakers should be carefully selected and prepared beforehand, and a certain number of us writers and poets should be invited to compose concise loyal addresses stating the case of the people. From these addresses two or three might be chosen and read or recited to the Tsar. Come to tea to-night, Volodia, and you shall give me your opinion upon a little paper I have written in case I should, at the proper moment, be one of those invited to speak for the people. Elsa is coming, Elsa Lanshof, who will be my wife, as you know, one day; she shall recite it for us; she recites most beautifully, and will do my little composition more than justice.’

So Pavlof went to Bibikof’s and listened while the fair Elsa, who was just such another child-like person as Bibikof himself, recited the address which was certainly a charming composition, somewhat perfervid and exagger-

ated in its expression of the devotion of the people towards the throne, but expressing concisely and ably the longings of the nation for reform, for the light of education, for the comfort of enlarged liberties, for freedom of conscience and opinion, for the inviolability of the person and of the home.

‘It is charmingly expressed,’ said Volodia when he had heard the paper; ‘the demands are just what the people may certainly put forward without offence, and the loyalty of the writer cannot be doubted. Moreover, Miss Elsa recited it delightfully, and the Tsar would be hard-hearted indeed if he were not touched by so eloquent an appeal so charmingly spoken.’

‘Ah! if spoken by Elsa, you mean; you are right, Volodia; did I not tell you she recites beautifully? Now I will confess a little more. It is our great ambition to be included, both of us, in the deputation which perhaps will one day wait upon the Tsar; but if not both of us two, we have decided that Elsa shall be the one. I shall be represented, you see, by this address, but it is Elsa who shall recite it, and perhaps move the Tsar to tears. We often picture to ourselves the scene; we laugh as we conjure it up, but for all our laughing we are in reality serious enough after a fashion, for such

is my confidence in our good Tsar, the Apostle of Peace and of Kindness, as all agree, that we are both convinced that if Elsa could but be in his presence, and the Tsar did but hear her recite this appeal, matters would take place just as we have imagined——’

Bibikof paused, expecting Pavlof to request further enlightenment, but Volodia was busy marvelling at the wonderful, simple, sanguine spirit of the little poet, and scarcely noticed the pause.

‘Here is the picture we so often conjure up,’ Bibikof continued. ‘The Tsar is in his Cabinet with the good Tsaritsa, wise and worthy spouse of the Apostle of Peace upon earth. With them are, perhaps, Witte, Mirsky, and one or two others who are on God’s side and the people’s, and by whom the deputation of five has been introduced. Some one begins and speaks, Maxim Gorky perhaps, or Gapon, one of our best, anyway; then another; the Tsar is moved, the Tsaritsa weeps; we are succeeding already. Then Elsa stands forward and recites, just as she recited but now, only with six times more of feeling; her face is flushed and beautiful, her eyes shine like stars, her voice trembles with the true emotion of the heart. The Tsar listens and breathes hard;

he sighs and glances at Mirsky and the others; the Tsaritsa seizes his hand. "Tsar!" she exclaims; "this is the very voice of the Russian people; it is a voice we have never heard until this day. Tell this lady that you are moved, that you have listened and will remember!" Then the Tsar himself speaks; the Tsar, mark you, speaks, and to Elsa:—

"Yes, she has spoken well. Are these your own words, Mademoiselle? These are words which should have been spoken to me long since. To know the wants of my people, to relieve them, to be one with my children—these are my chief desires."

"Sire," Elsa will say, "the address is written by one I love and who will one day marry me; at present we are very poor." The Tsar speaks again:—

"The address is loyal and eloquent; it shall be preserved in the archives of the Court. What is this man's name?"

"Bibikof, your Majesty."

"It shall be remembered," and so forth, a dream, you will say, Volodia, and a foolish one perhaps, and yet I dare to believe that if the Tsar did but receive this deputation, and if Elsa did but recite the appeal, it is a dream which might come near to the truth.'


Pavlof could scarcely refrain from smiling, though he was moved by the pathos of Bibikof's touching faith in the ideal Tsar he had set up for himself. These two simple souls saw no foolishness in the vision their optimism had conjured up.

'Alas! there are so many "ifs,"' he said. 'Nevertheless, it is a beautiful vision. There are many of us who believe that until the Tsar may be approached in person our complaints can never reach his ears; and if such a deputation could be arranged, and the Tsar indeed listened to Miss Elsa's voice, why, your air-castle might suddenly become a substantial edifice.'

'There, there, Elsa; listen!' cried Bibikof in delight. 'Monsieur Pavlof is with us in the matter of the deputation; he is with us also in that he appreciates our appeal—naturally he cannot answer for the Tsar's reception of it, but his Sacred Majesty must have a hard heart, indeed, if he is not moved. Well, well, let us trust in God and in the Tsar. There are some who speak of him as though he were the enemy of his people, not their father. You are not one of those, Volodia.'

'God forbid,' said Pavlof; 'I say, let the

Tsar have a fair chance of hearing. At present, his ears are stopped, as it were, with cotton wool; the cry of the people has not yet reached him; who is the man that will remove the obstruction so that he may hear? That is the man to whom all Russia will raise a statue as high as Heaven itself.'



CHAPTER XXIII

PAVLOF had not realised what it would cost him to do without his weekly visits to Nathalie. He missed her terribly. The news that she had been the mistress of the Grand Duke had not turned him against her, though certainly it had shocked him; he blamed only Maximilian. 'When a Grand Duke woos,' he had said, 'it is different.'

There were circumstances in his own life and in his relations with the Grand Duke Maximilian which inclined him to think very leniently of one who, placed in Nathalie's position, had been unable to withstand the advances of his Imperial Highness.

When he had lived for a fortnight without seeing her, and had received no news of her whereabouts, it occurred to him that he would go to the old flat in the Galernaya in order to see whether by any chance she had repented of her intention to break with the Grand Duke, and had remained there. He went somewhat

shyly to the house and interviewed Kuzma, the hall porter.

Kuzma laughed when asked whether Madame was at home.

‘That is a question which is scarcely worth asking,’ he replied, ‘since Madame has been absent for a fortnight.’

‘Absent for a fortnight?’ repeated Pavlof; ‘and whither has she gone?’

‘That I think you might tell me more easily than I you,’ said Kuzma.

‘But I have not the slightest idea,’ Volodia persisted. ‘Why should I know?’

The man laughed, quite courteously, but made no reply.

‘What do you mean, fool?’ said Pavlof angrily. ‘You stand and grin like an idiot but give no information. Why do you suppose I should come here to ask after Madame if I know where she is?’

‘To lay a false scent—why else?’ said Kuzma. ‘Ah, Gospodin Pavlof! it is good to be young and handsome; even the big ones must yield when youth is in the field! Where is Madame? There are possessions of hers remaining here which she could have without any one, you understand, being told, if only I knew where to find her.’

‘I wish I could tell you, man. You do not believe me, I see ; but by all the Saints it is the truth.’

‘Perhaps ; but there is one who would certainly not believe, if he should see you. If you are wise you will not go where he may encounter you.’

‘Is he then so angry ?’

‘Very furious ; he has been three times. I have been called all the evil names in the language because I can give no information. “Has the youth been ?” he has asked every time, meaning you ; and when I reply, No, he says, “Then they have gone together !” He makes a show of laughing, but he is very furious. To meet him would not be safe for you.’

‘No, I am not afraid ; if I saw him I should tell him as I now tell you, that I know nothing. If he should ask after me again, tell him this—let him believe or not, what care I ; it is true. Well, tell me as much as you know.’

‘A fortnight to-morrow it will be. She went with Lizette. They would go for a month to Paris. The carriage took them with many trunks to the Varshafsky railway station, and since then there is no news. They did not, however, leave by train. It is thought that Madame returned into the town in a hired

carriage and is at present concealed in some distant quarter of the city.'

'Yes, that may be.'

'Will you take Madame's property, some odd jewellery and such things, in a box?' asked Kuzma, looking sly.

Pavlof felt angry, but could not help laughing at the man's persistence in suspecting him. Moreover, when he left the Galernaya to walk home, he soon realised that he was being shadowed by a man who had been waiting about in the street.

As soon as he realised this fact, Pavlof turned suddenly and encountered the man.

'You are following me, my friend,' he said. 'Why?'

The fellow protested that he was doing nothing of the kind. 'You must have a bad conscience,' he said, 'if a man may not walk in the same direction as yourself, behind you, without being suspected of shadowing.'

'Good conscience or bad, I know that you are lying,' said Volodia. 'What is more, I will tell you, if you like, why you are following me, and on whose behalf.'

'If it amuses you to talk into the air, talk,' replied the fellow; 'but do not expect me to listen.'

‘Oh, but I do expect it, and for this reason. You have been set to watch for me by a very great personage, no less than a Grand Duke. Ah! I see I am right; you should have more command over yourself than to start when the truth is told you! You are to watch me in hopes that I may reveal to your employer, a certain address. Go to your employer, then, and say that I do not know the address required. If he should need further assurance, I am ready to accord him an interview. Let him send for me and I will come.’

‘And your own address?’

Pavlof gave it. The fellow, he saw, followed him home in order to verify it.

The following day he received a visit from Maximilian, who came in the evening and well muffled. The old woman, who acted as house-keeper to Volodia, announced the visitor with awe as a Tsarsky officer in uniform and with decorations.’

‘Well, where then is she?’ his Highness inquired, without greeting or prelude, when Pavlof entered the room.

Volodia replied boldly: ‘I sent a message that I do not know. I will now add that if I did I should assuredly not tell you.’

‘If you do not know, why has she departed?’

‘That is a different question, Highness. It is one to which at least the answer may be guessed. You may remember that I told your Highness how a man had informed me of her relations with you, and that I had indignantly given him the lie. You repeated my tale to her——’

‘Yes; we laughed over it together. What has this to do with my question? Why, I say, has she departed?’

‘Because she is ashamed. For you, it is nothing to betray a woman; but the woman may one day awake to the consciousness that her position as mistress to a man, even a Grand Duke, is disgraceful.’

‘She is the more likely to do so if it is constantly dinned into her ears by parties interested, perhaps, in persuading her to believe it.’

‘Your Highness would not understand, therefore I will not insist upon it, that I was not aware of her position. Knowing your Highness’s character I certainly regarded her acquaintance with you as dangerous——’

The Grand Duke laughed angrily. ‘You are too good for this world,’ he said, ‘or would have it thought so. I admit that I am no saint, but neither is Madame. Why should

she suddenly grow ashamed of her position, unless some one had sought to reap in his neighbour's wheat-field. Come, where is she ?'

'I have told you, Highness, I do not know. If I did, do you suppose I would tell you, seeing that it is obviously her desire to remain concealed from you ?'

'I see, you defy me—you and she ; it is a plot ; you are in love with her—oh, that much I knew long since, but I did not suppose she would be so foolish as to break with me. Are you not afraid of my vengeance ? I have been a good friend to you, but my good-will cannot survive such treachery.'

'Your Highness certainly has the means to ruin and destroy me, but how have I offended ? I have grown fond of Madame, true. See how she has befriended me : is it wonderful that I should have learned to love her ? It is my misfortune, for we have finally parted. As for her relations with your Highness, if she has ended those relations it is none of my doing. I did not persuade her to end them, because I did not know of their existence. When she at last informed me, she had already broken with you. I do not say that I should not have attempted to persuade her to abandon such a

connection even from the first, if I had known of it. That is the sum of my offence.'

'Such a tale is incredible; I am unable to believe it. You shall be watched, my friend, and if it is found that you have lied to me and you are visiting Madame, even my great goodwill towards you will not preserve you from chastisement.'

'If I knew where she is hidden,' said Volodia boldly; 'or if by chance I should learn where she is to be found, all your spies should not deter me if I desired to see her.'

'Well, we shall know what we shall know,' said the Grand Duke, 'meanwhile, you are warned!'

CHAPTER XXIV

MORE than one consideration prevented Nathalie from communicating with Volodia, though she longed to see him. One was the blighting sense of shame. Though too polite and considerate to show it to the full, Volodia, she reflected, had been terribly shocked by her disclosure. In order to avoid entanglement with a woman so disgraced, he had blurted out the story of his marriage and of some imaginary responsibility towards a wife who had deserted him. He had never mentioned his marriage before, therefore he had obviously now brought it forward as an excuse for breaking with her. Well, he should never see her again; even though it broke her heart of hearts, Volodia should not have another opportunity to show her that he despised her. Moreover, if she were to communicate her address to him, and he were to pay her a farewell visit, as he had suggested, Maximilian, suspecting his young rival, would undoubtedly have a spy on the watch ready to follow him

and so ascertain the secret of her whereabouts. This would be dangerous for Volodia, and probably for herself also: for Nathalie knew enough of grand dukes to be well aware that a quarrel with Maximilian, though his Highness compared favourably with most of his relatives, might possibly end in disaster if she remained obstinate in her determination to break with him, and as to her intention to have no more to do with him, there was no room for question.

Nathalie scarcely knew herself in the present crisis. But a few months ago she had felt proud of her position as an intimate friend of a Grand Seigneur. Of course she was well aware that a few of the more old-fashioned of the Russian ladies of society would have gathered their skirts in passing her; but certainly most of her friends thought but little of such things, and possibly some of them envied her. She had been fond enough of her elderly lover then. Maximilian was certainly the best of the Grand Dukes, every one admitted that, and the best-looking. He was a widower, too, and doubtless—so he had assured Nathalie—he would have married her if such a thing had been possible; but marriage would have involved a quarrel with his Majesty, and probably banishment from his native land.

Of all this the Grand Duke easily persuaded her, for Maximilian was eloquent and an accomplished lover, and Nathalie had believed; she fell in with his views, with the result that, for the time being, so far from feeling any shame in her position, she had gloried in it, and honestly believed that she was the envy of her acquaintances.

Then Volodia came, and the point of view gradually changed, until now she felt that she would gladly give ten years of her life to have been able to tell Volodia that in standing up for her honour he had done her justice. Instead, she had been obliged, to her bitter shame, to confess that he had stultified himself by acting champion to a woman whose vileness had made her unworthy of his chivalry.

And now she had lost him; for even though he should forgive her and desire to renew his friendship with her, she felt at present that she would die sooner than see him again.

Consequently Volodia was left without word of any kind, a state of affairs which he had not anticipated and which worried him much. Occasionally he encountered the men placed by Maximilian to shadow him in hopes that he would reveal Nathalie's hiding-place by visiting her, when he would intentionally lead them

a long and weary dance half round the city of St. Petersburg.

Once, a month after Nathalie's disappearance, he stopped one of these patient individuals and spoke to him.

'You must be getting tired of your job, my friend,' he said. 'Had you not better go and tell your employer that you are convinced I know no more than he as to the address he requires?'

The man stared and pretended absolute ignorance as to what was meant.

'Who are you, and what is it you refer to?' he inquired.

'Come, come, I have watched you for three weeks just as you have watched me; I am quite aware of the instructions you hold and of the name of your employer. Why, man, I peep out at you every day from my window—you have a room opposite, you and the other fellow together; I shall feel quite lonely when you no longer shadow me.'

Then the spy, seeing that the game was up as far as secrecy was concerned, laughed and said that in that case, and seeing that Gospodin Pavlof knew quite as much about the job upon which he and his friend were employed as they did themselves, it was obvious that no harm was being done to any one concerned, and

therefore things might as well remain as they were.

‘It must be amusing for you to spend eight or nine hours a day outside my office,’ Pavlof laughed. ‘How do you employ yourselves?’

‘Ah, there you betray a weak point in your keenness of observation,’ laughed the fellow. ‘We have an understudy during those hours; his business is in a shop opposite the entrance to Laferme’s, where you work; he can watch the door all day; we take you there, as you are aware, and bring you back again. If you leave during working hours, he knows where to find us after marking you down.’

‘Excellent,’ said Volodia, quite impressed; ‘well done. I am glad to think that so much of your valuable time is not utterly wasted as I had feared. How long is the shadowing process to continue?’

‘So long as there is good money to be had for it. Be sure I shall not deliver your message to our employer, namely, that you know nothing! Our present job, you see, is a profitable and easy one; we do not wish it terminated.’

‘I understand. It is a good thing that your employer is a rich man and can afford to spend a hundred or two of roubles in making others happy.’

‘That is not our business ; we are employed by the Department. If you know the name of the principal in this matter, we do not. It is not our affair. There is no need to inform the Department that we have come to an understanding, you and I.’

‘What is the job worth to you, then?’

‘It is not bad, in a modest way: five pounds a month each, and of course board and lodging.’

Volodia was here inspired by an excellent idea.

‘You are doing well,’ he laughed; ‘but it seems to me that I have it in my hands to spoil your game if I choose. I am well acquainted with the principal in this matter. We are, indeed, good friends; he will laugh when I tell him that I have discovered his game—it is a little matter of rivalry in love, you must understand, and—well—your share of the game is over. Now, what is it worth to me if I allow the comedy to continue for another month or two? I am not too well off; a pound or two in my pocket would be a comfort to me, and you, of course, could do as you like about continuing to shadow me. There are better ways of spending one’s time if ~~one~~ has money in one’s pocket!’

The upshot of this little stroke of business was, that Volodia found himself the richer by fifteen roubles, which is about thirty shillings, per month, the first instalment of which proved extremely useful in relieving certain cases of distress among his poorer acquaintances.

The shadowing continued, but spasmodically. Spies are doubtless not altogether without conscience, and it is to the credit of Messrs. Agafof and Doobin that occasionally their sense of the rights and wrongs of things prompted them to put in a day or a half day of work, even though they were quite convinced by this time that the occupation was mere waste of time. They owed it, they felt, to the Department to do this much, even though well aware that it was lost labour, and that the wasted hours would be far more profitably spent in playing dominoes at the Kabak in the Maly Prospect.

As for Volodia, he was glad enough to have shaken off his shadows; for at this time, what with his own grief, which could only be forgotten in concentration of thought upon other matters, and the increasing movement of the political tides, which kept him busy attending meetings of reformers, of workmen, and occasionally of revolutionists, he was constantly employed during the evenings in visiting places

and people unbeloved by the authorities: and to have been constantly watched and marked down by his shadows might easily have ended in trouble with the powers that be, since his goings and comings would have been duly reported by Agafof to his Department.

CHAPTER XXV

It is seldom that a villager of the type of Senka Harkof takes the disease of love so badly as this ferocious rascal had been infected by the mischievous germ. With such men the malady assumes a peculiar form. Senka had made love fiercely, and Matrona had disdainfully rejected his advances. He had revenged himself by exerting himself to get her convicted of Shadrine's murder, and in this he had succeeded so well that the Court found her guilty and sentenced her to deportation. One would have supposed that this would be the end of Senka's short, fierce, highly unsuccessful love-affair, but such was far from being the case. Senka had quite other ideas; for him the matter was only in its initial stage.

Senka bought a cheap ticket to a small station on the Siberian line. This was a station at which all trains conveying convicts to the East disgorged their unhappy passengers in order that at the large sheds adjoining the

station, in which convicts from all quarters were assembled, gangs might be made up and the prisoners sorted for their various destinations. Here Senka remained and watched the trains arrive. He had been informed that certain arrangements might occasionally be made with the assistance of the soldiers in charge of convict parties, and Senka knew exactly what he intended to do should fortune favour him.

Fortune proved highly propitious. Senka watched Matrona arrive with her company, and saw her marched off to the Rest House. Among her companions he observed one at least who showed signs of belonging to the wealthy classes; a man well dressed and seemingly prosperous; probably a rich merchant who had somehow fallen foul of the powers that be.

Senka loitered about the Rest House until he found opportunity to speak to one of the soldiers in whose charge the party had arrived. When this man was off duty, the prisoners being safely locked up for the night, he invited the fellow to drink with him at the Kabak in the village, an invitation which was promptly accepted.

Then Senka conversed pleasantly about things in general and the soldier spoke mainly

about convicts, the subject nearest and dearest to the man, who was not the conventional brutal person generally represented as in charge of convict gangs, but a man with the remains of a human heart in his bosom, and some semblance of a lingering sympathy for his fellow creatures, which long apprenticeship in his present vocation had not altogether succeeded in eliminating.

‘Is it true,’ asked Senka, ‘that there are occasionally among the prisoners well-to-do persons, comparatively innocent, who are willing to pay large sums for a substitute?’

‘I have heard so,’ laughed the soldier, ‘but one does not easily believe such things. Who would be such a fool as to go of his free will even for a price?’

‘Ah! but the price; think how much may depend upon that!’ said Senka.

‘Any price. You have not been, you do not know; it is not a pleasant picnic party, this journeying to Siberia. Remember, also, that he who goes once may never return.’

‘Bah! Russia is not so delightful a country; Siberia may be better, for some. What if a man’s woman is taken and he would join her?’

‘Let him go as a free man, this is permitted by authority. Siberia must be colonised, the

man will have his woman in two years, and may settle in Siberia if he is fool enough; they will encourage him to breed Siberian colonists.'

'Devil take it! there might be worse things. You have, I see, a rich man among your company.'

'What of it?' said the soldier, beginning to smell a rat; 'you speak odd things, and your eyes are red and your lips white. What of my rich convict?'

'I see that you are near guessing my secret. My woman is with your party. I want her and I want money—do you understand? There is profit for you also in this matter. What, now, would a rich prisoner pay for a substitute, supposing that a man were found willing to take his place and his punishment, and a soldier in charge were found willing to arrange the matter for a share of the payment?'

'Ah! what share? Devil take it, I tremble all over; I see no harm in this; let us consider: for him there is freedom and happiness, for you the woman you desire, together with a sum of money which will buy you a farm when her two years are past; for me, money also—God knows I require it—my wife and children starve at the village; the Department loses no prisoner, for in the place of one who goes out another

comes in. *Boje moy!* Well, speak, I see there is reason for your odd talk and for the something which is behind your eyes.'

'Then I propose that you go and fetch your companion, the other soldier, for he too must participate. If he agrees, then fetch also the convict. Let him come here and all may be arranged before the night is over. His clothes will become mine, also his name and his passport—he receiving mine in exchange. Devil take it! I wish him joy of this polshoobka! Why do you tremble? there is no risk; your officer is asleep in his comfortable bed; to-morrow he will see only the same rich shooba and the seal-skin cap. He will not suspect that another head is inside it.'

The soldier disappeared for an hour; when he reappeared there came in his company the well-dressed convict, bewildered, agitated, scarcely believing his good fortune, a hint of which Senka's conspirator had whispered as they came along.

He presently turned out his pockets, which contained, it was found, over two hundred pounds in notes.

'Take all—every farthing,' he muttered excitedly: 'for God's sake take it and let me go. Dear Saints! this is providential indeed, to

have found friends! You are sure you are a willing substitute?' he added in a momentary shock of conscientious terror lest he should be unwittingly wronging a fellow creature.

'I am willing enough—it is I that set the ball rolling,' said Senka.

'But why—you are escaping, perhaps, from some intolerable position? But what of your wife, your family, will they be left in distress? If so, I will——'

Senka laughed. 'I have none—do you take me for a fool? The woman I want is in your gang. Now do you understand?'

'Thank God! then all things tend for your happiness and for mine. My sentence is a light one—three years of exile, which may be shortened, but I have left my dear wife, my family. Take this money, and God go with you; I shall pray for your happiness. I wish there were more cash—leave me enough to return to Louga where I live—it is all I need. I shall not reveal myself in Louga excepting to my own wife, whom, with my children, I shall immediately remove far away——'

The poor fellow, half demented with happiness, divested himself of his rich outer garments, which Senka, laughing and cursing, promptly donned. Arrayed in Senka's filthy polshoobka,

the greasy, grimy, sheep-skin kaftan, which is the winter garment of the moujik; in Senka's peasant knee-boots and baggy trousers, and retaining only his own body linen, the merchant was then allowed to take his departure in the darkness. At early morning he caught a train going west, and so, journeying happily towards his lost home and happiness about to be recovered—as he firmly believed—by direct interposition of a kind Providence, he departs from this history.

Then the three conspirators divided the spoils, and eventually Senka departed upon his long journey East, arrayed like a prince and with the equivalent of one hundred pounds in his pocket, while the two soldiers, his companions in fraud, travelled each with the pleasant and unfamiliar consciousness of wealth in actual possession to the extent of fifty odd pounds, a consciousness which immensely lightened their wearisome journey East.

It was some time before poor Matrona realised that Senka Harkof was among the convicts marching in her own gang. The moment when she became aware of it was perhaps the most horrible in her life. Poor Matrona had by this time already fallen in love with another companion; she had always suffered from the

impressionable tendency, and being now, as she believed, a widow, there was no harm in falling in love if it pleased her to do so. The discovery of Senka was the proverbial bolt from the blue. There were the beginnings of possible tragedy in the discovery, and she knew it. She shrieked and raved upon recognising him, declaring that the man was one Harkof who had threatened her. The guards—their officer with them—did their best to comfort her. The man's name was not Harkof, they assured her, but Ilinsky, as per passport. The man himself laughed and said she was mad. But Matrona refused to be comforted, and raved and wept as though her very heart would break.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE party of revolution in Russia was at this time playing a very strong game. Having recognised that by terrorism and bombs alone the auto-bureaucrats were not to be intimidated into granting necessary reforms, and that without the proletariat on their side there was little hope of success in their political aims, they redoubled their exertions to gain over the masses, making superhuman efforts to excite the slow imagination of the operatives to a sense of their wrongs and disabilities. Gradually they were obtaining their desire, and the tragic events of Vladimir's Sunday were approaching.

But the old fiction of the Little Father the Tsar and his beloved children the Russian people died hard. In spite of every argument addressed to the workmen to rise in their might and demand by force the rights which had been denied them, the operatives were not to be persuaded to any kind of violence. There were wise advisers among them as well as reckless

counsellors. 'The Tsar is our father,' they replied in effect; 'we will approach him as loyal children and ask him to listen to our prayers; he *will* listen; we will go to his palace and see him face to face.'

The party of revolution were by no means averse to this arrangement. Wiser in the knowledge of the brutality of Russian official methods, they knew well enough that the answer of the Government to such a demonstration as was now suggested would be charges of mounted gendarmes, volleys of rifle bullets, the shrieks of the wounded, the ghastly rows of the dead.

They agreed therefore willingly to the processions and petitions and demonstrations.

'Let us try it by all means,' they said. 'The Tsar, you say, is our father, let us see what reply he will have for his children; maybe he will be kind, who knows? But what if he chastises us with rods?'

'He will not hurt us—why should he? We mean no harm and we shall go peacefully, with soft words upon our lips and loyal hearts in our breasts. We shall say, "Tsar, there are so many between our father and his children that it is difficult for you to hear when we cry; therefore we have come that you may see us

face to face and hear our complaint. Help us, Tsar; there are certain things which we need; we have put them on paper that you may read them at leisure; it is true what is there written.”’

‘Well, go then,’ said the agitators; ‘choose some leaders to arrange matters for you. You have the right to demand audience of the Tsar—let your leaders demand audience. Go to the palace in procession; it is a good thought. If you succeed in seeing the Tsar and in persuading him, well; if not, we shall converse again upon this matter.’

The more the revolutionists considered the question the better they were pleased with it. The most unlikely thing in the world was that which these simple-minded peasants expected: that the Tsar would appear and address them. His coterie of Grand Dukes and timid counsellors would not hear of it. They would not discern that here was indeed the most magnificent opportunity ever offered to a sovereign to capture the hearts of his people at a single stroke, to effect in a minute all that ages of repressive policy had failed to accomplish, to remove with a few kind words and vague promises the growing sense of discontent which was at length permeating all classes in Russia,

even the thick heads of the village peasants and of the proletariat who had clung so long to the pathetic fiction of a Tsar who is the father of his people.

Many of the milder reform societies approved of the scheme of the operatives' peaceful demonstration, and their members even resolved to take part in the procession.

Bibikof and his faithful Elsa were of course among them. Indeed, they intended so to manœuvre that when the procession reached the Winter Palace they should both be in the very front rank of the petitioners. A few days before that fateful Sunday Bibikof came to Elsa in great excitement and explained his intention.

'It is our only chance,' he told her, 'since my scheme of a selected deputation has been shelved in favour of this bigger thing. When the Tsar comes out to speak to the people he may feel embarrassed by the numbers, and some one will call out, "Receive a few of us, Tsar, who shall speak for the rest." In fact, Antonof has promised to shout these very words—I have squared him; then he and others are going to shout your name and mine among those suggested as members of the deputation. Only think of the honour of it, Elsa! We shall be

handed down to history. It shall be written of us, "Among those chosen to represent the people at this historic interview were Elsa Lanshof and Edouard Bibikof, the author of a beautiful address to the Tsar, which was presently recited to the Emperor and moved his Majesty, it is said, to tears." Oh! thank God for next Sunday, Elsa; it is going to be the true birthday of the Russian people, and you and I shall play a chief part in the great things to be said and done——'

'Oh, it is splendid, Edouard!' murmured Elsa, who was quite as foolish a person as Bibikof himself. 'Please continue; I love to hear you speak when you are in this mood!'

'The birthday of the Russian people!' repeated Bibikof. 'Is not the idea sublime, Elsa? The day upon which the people—his children—will come to their father, smiling and happy and radiant with anticipation, to receive their gifts; rich gifts prepared for them by a loving parent; as freedom and education and light. It is only God and the Tsar who can say "Let there be light"—and there shall be light. This is the day of which history shall say in truth, "The evening and the morning were the first day!" Do you know, Elsa, I have added something to the

address—it is only a few words and you shall learn them by heart in one moment of time. Listen—"Tsar, it has been said by a Father of the Church, referring to the sway of a wicked despot, that 'When justice is set aside, monarchy becomes mere brigandage'; but of your beneficent reign it shall be said, 'Under his rule autocracy became a synonym for mercy, and monarchy received from the hands of the people its greatest crown and glory, the diadem of a nation's love.'"

'Yes, that is beautiful—I will learn it at once,' Elsa gasped, breathless with delight and agitation; 'correct me, Edouard, "it has been said by a Father of the Church that——"'

'No, first "referring to the sway of a wicked despot——"'

Elsa corrected herself and presently learned to repeat her lesson glibly and accurately, and so the simple pair prepared themselves for the day of wrath and brutality.

Volodia Pavlof regarded the coming demonstration with mixed feelings.

He was by no means blind to the fact that the party of revolution had scored a huge success in persuading the proletariat to arise. Once their demonstration had failed, and, as he believed, it was almost certain to fail, for the

Tsar would never be permitted by his advisers to take the only step which would retain for him the tottering confidence of the masses of the people, once those masses had been disappointed, they would certainly range themselves upon the side of revolt. If the military should be called out and shots be fired, these men, who were to-day loyalists and believers in the benevolent personality of a Tsar, would suddenly lose faith, and the autocracy would find arrayed against it, not a limited party of revolution, not a few terrorists who trusted to their bombs for the redress of a nation's grievances, but the nation itself—all Russia. This would, in fact, be the beginning of the end.

‘Is such a state of affairs to be desired or not?’ Pavlof reflected. Like every other reasonable Russian he would prefer that adequate reforms should be granted freely in response to the peaceful demands of the people, but he did not believe in the power of the Tsar to grant reforms. The family circle which hedged him about would stifle his goodwill, even if he actually possessed it, which was quite uncertain. Regretfully Volodia foresaw that the end of all these things must be war: war between the autocracy and the

people. As to the outcome of that war, who could prophesy? Would the army declare for the Tsar? If so, for a while the *status quo* would triumph.

Meanwhile the people prepared for the gigantic enterprise of Sunday, the great majority believing, trusting, confidently hoping; those who were wiser fearing almost with certainty that they played to lose.

CHAPTER XXVII

OF the actual events of the preceding Saturday, when helpless ministers, aware of the impending disaster, shifted responsibility from shoulder to shoulder and stood aside awaiting the inevitable crash ; of the *débâcle* of the miserable Sunday which witnessed the great awakening of the Russian people, it is unnecessary to speak in this place. This was, indeed, as poor Bibikof had foretold, the birthday of the nation, but not in the sense in which he had used the words. This was the birthday of the fighting spirit of the people, the death-day of the love and confidence which had been reposed in the person of the Tsar. Henceforth the autocracy might pretend to give laws, to keep order ; it might appear to gain for the time being those ends, but as a matter of fact it would be defending its existence, no more. A day, this, of bitter, cruel disappointments but also of dawning hopes. At any rate the Russian people spoke, this

fateful Sunday, in such a way that the Tsar, for all his entourage, could not fail to hear.

Bibikof and Elsa walked in procession with a great company which assembled on the 'Petersburg side' of the city, an orderly mob of several hundreds, headed by a priest in vestments carrying an ikon. Their way lay across the Troitsky Bridge and thence along the great quay to the Winter Palace. But at the rising ground leading to the bridge they found troops drawn up to oppose their passage—Cossacks who played schoolboy games, running and chasing one another in the most lighthearted manner until the procession approached, when they reluctantly ceased their gambols in order to bar the way.

'Go back and disperse,' the petitioners were good-naturedly told. 'There are to be no demonstrations, by order.'

Little Bibikof stood out in front of his companions.

'But we are going to the Tsar; his Majesty expects us,' he said. 'We shall lay at his feet a loyal petition; I have in my pocket an address; I am Bibikof, a Russian and a poet.'

'You are Bibikof, a very foolish person,' said the officer of the Cossacks, 'unless you turn

with your companions and retire the way you have come.'

'But that is impossible: we are bound for the palace—you will not use force to prevent us?'

'Most certainly.'

'This is a peaceful procession of loyal and perfectly harmless citizens; we do not carry arms; we only desire to reach the palace where the Tsar himself will receive us; you must have misunderstood your instructions.'

'I warn you to retire. Our instructions are our own affair.'

A hurried consultation took place. Many of the crowd tailed off from the main company and retired to a distance. Those who remained presently moved forward a few paces. The Cossacks fired a blank volley over their heads. Many of the people now lost heart; they broke rank and frankly ran away, the rest stood their ground.

Then the horror began. The first shots riddled the ikon and killed the priest and others. Bibikof fell dead into the arms of poor shrieking Elsa, his loyal address in his pocket. Elsa herself survived him but by one moment of anguish. The firing ceased, and the Cossacks laughed.

‘*Chort vozmee*, devil take it!’ they exclaimed; ‘what fools are people who will not take a hint.’

Bewildered, horrified, yet unable to realise that so terrible a tragedy had actually happened, the people picked up their dead and retired to a distance; the soldiers resumed their sports; it was cold, and they had waited several hours. A man stood out and shouted to them:—

‘You devils!’ he shrieked, ‘you run away from the Japanskys, but your own brothers you are ready to shoot down, because we are not armed!’

Two or three of the soldiers laughed, but paused in their game to shoot the man down.

The same kind of scene was enacted in other parts of the town.

Some impulse drove Volodia Pavlof to stand with the crowd which assembled under the Grand Duke Maximilian’s palace. A great mob of people slowly made their way past the massive building, *en route* for the Winter Palace. Volodia stood among those who watched them pass; he had no desire to be with those who made for the Tsar’s abode; if the mob were to be roughly treated by gendarmes or cavalry, the onslaught would

happen in the Square of the Admiralty or the Alexander Gardens, close to the *Zimny Dvoretz*, the Winter Palace

To his surprise a window suddenly opened in the great building opposite to him and the Grand Duke appeared.

'See!' cried some one in the crowd, 'who is that? *Chort vozmee*' it is his Highness Maximilian!'

'*Vzdor*!' A Grand Duke show himself to the people—nonsense! It is an officer—perhaps one of his suite—sent to report what is to be seen.'

'No; it is the Grand Duke. If the Tsar can receive us, why not this grandee, who is the cousin of his Father? This is a good omen that we are to be received! Hush! he is shouting to us. Silence all; see, his Imperial Highness himself—he speaks!'

'My children,' shouted Maximilian, 'I am the Grand Duke Maximilian Petrovitch. I speak to you as your friend. Do not go to the Winter Palace; the Tsar is not there; if he were there he could not receive you, for such gatherings of the people are illegal.'

'*Ne vere-te yemoo, rebyáta, vriot!*' cried some one. 'Don't believe him, children; he lies!'

But the people listened on, for the Grand Duke still stood at the window.

‘I am your friend, rebyáta,’ he said; ‘I wish you no harm; the Tsar will presently give you reforms; he is thinking of you; but I warn you that you are acting illegally; the soldiers will not permit you to gather at the palace.’

A man near Pavlof was about to throw a stick, but Volodia held his arm. One or two sticks and stones were thrown amid the protests of the majority. The Grand Duke disappeared and the window was closed.

Volodia’s companion, a half-drunken and much excited person, was for assaulting him for preventing the throwing of the stick; but instead of striking, he stared at him. He laughed aloud.

‘Why, brothers, see here; am I very drunk, or is this another Maximilian? You have just seen the one, now look at the other.’

‘You fool,’ laughed a man who stood by, ‘this is one of our own, Vladimir Drugof is his name; but it is true, Volodia, you are like him.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Pavlof flushing; ‘the vodka is in your eyes. This fool would have thrown a stick at the Grand Duke; that is not the

way to persuade the Tsar to receive our petitions—to throw sticks at his cousin.'

'He spoke like a traitor. Have you not heard that the Tsar may never hear or speak unless the thing to be heard or to be said is first approved by the Grand Dukes? He will not receive our petitions unless he does so in spite of his relations; therefore I threw my stick. This day at least their mouths shall be closed.'

'You lie; he spoke honestly as our well-wisher; he is not like Apollon and Poseidon and the rest: he is a better friend to the people.'

'It is you who lie. He would have prevented the people from approaching the Tsar: that is the game of the Grand Dukes; it has ever been so and ever shall be. The Grand Dukes are the people's enemies, because they stand between us and our Little Father.'

'Well, we shall see. What is this commotion? The devil! It is a charge of gendarmes—mounted; run, or climb over the parapet and get upon the ice. *Boje moy*' they are driving the people like sheep!'

A hundred mounted men swept down the packed road, upsetting and crushing scores of the people, who found it impossible to clear a

way for them. A gendarme narrowly missed riding over Volodia, who swore at him as he passed. The man laughed and struck at Pavlof with his heavy whip. The half-drunken abuser of grand dukes lay panting in the road, a horse having knocked him down and deprived him of every particle of breath. Volodia picked him up and found that his arm was broken.

A volley of shots was heard at this moment from the direction of the Winter Palace. Men looked blankly at one another. Volodia attended to the injured man, binding up his arm with a handkerchief. He had heard the shots and understood well their significance. The fat was in the fire; the *dies iræ* had begun—how would it end?

His injured companion leaned against the granite parapet of the quay and swore without ceasing. More shots were heard, and a crowd of people came rushing down the quay, pursued by cavalry. The mob waiting outside Maximilian's palace paused but a moment to break the Grand Duke's windows, presumably because he had spoken unpalatable truths, then they too ran before the terror.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A WEEK had passed since Vladimir's Day of Horror, and the Russian people had begun to take stock of their position.

There no longer existed, at any rate in the towns throughout Russia, that love and confidence in the Tsar which had for centuries belonged to him by right—the ungrudged, unquestioning tribute of the masses of his people. Even in the villages, where ideas move slowly, uncomfortable doubts had begun to take root in the dull minds of the peasants. Could it be true that the Little Father had ordered, or even permitted, his soldiers to fire upon the people? If so there must surely be something wrong in the ancient, pathetic theory of father and children. The operatives in the towns no longer dwelt in the paradise of fools; the scales had fallen from their eyes. From loyal citizens they had become in a day, and by tens of thousands, indignant revolutionists, determined to exact by force those rights which

they had been forbidden to demand by peaceful methods.

The first Imperial Ukase since Vladimir's Day had appeared. It embodied no mention of reforms. Pobiedonostsef, the Apostle of Reaction, was to wear a stripe upon his trousers—that was all. This was the Tsar's reply, this and the rifle-shots, to the bitter cry of his people!

The reform societies, numberless little secret communities of entirely innocent persons of liberal views, took a fresh hold of the rope of discontent which now united all parties and began to put a stronger pull upon it. Moderate reformers became bitter denounciators of the Government and loud demanders for a change; revolutionists laughed and plumed themselves, because by their exertions the Russian people had at length been awakened from their sleep; things moved at last.

And though spying multiplied, the societies met and discussed matters with far more freedom than before; people seemed to have less fear because the Government was at sixes and sevens and chaos brooded over the council-chambers of the State. Yet, in spite of everything, the Tsar and his relatives and the reactionary ministers yielded no ground; it was as though

they stood at bay to defend their system, while all Russia arrayed itself against them.

Volodia Pavlof attended the meeting of a society which, up to Vladimir's Day, had been distinguished for the moderation of its views. He soon found that this circle, like others, had quite changed since the *dies iræ*.

The first speaker at this important meeting—a foreman named Boyarof—impressed all present by his obvious patriotism and earnestness.

‘My brothers,’ he began, ‘I am going to make a speech for which I may lose my liberty, and perhaps my life, because—those will pardon me who are innocent—I know very well that not all who are present are to be trusted, but that two or three among us are agents of the authorities. You will see that I have spoken truly. Nevertheless, it may be that these words of mine will go forth to the people, and if so, then I lay down my life very willingly, because it is necessary above all things that the people should know. My brothers, the Tsar is a good man; that is, God intended him to be a good man; but as Tsar he is utterly incompetent. We have no longer any hope in him. We are governed to-day not by law but by caprice—the caprice of one

weak man. There are men, servants of the Tsar, who are wise, who understand the writing on the wall, who advise the Tsar. When one of these has spoken words of wisdom to the Tsar, the Tsar is also wise, but for how long? The Tsar lives in a circumscribed area, at each corner of which stands a Grand Duke or a Pobiedonostsef. If he would go forth upon the right side in the direction where Reform lies, he is confronted by his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Apollon, who cries out to him, "Sire and cousin, Reform is a flaming sword; place it not in the hands of your people, for they will direct it against your throat and our throats." If the Tsar turns to the left hand, where Justice dwells, the Grand Duke Nikifor upstands against him. "Sire and nephew!" he cries; "beware! The people shriek for justice, but their hands are red with the blood of your servants; first discipline—then concession, if you will." And all the while Pobiedonostsef stands and brays out, "Sire, all powerful! Russia is your own; do with her as you will. Only one thing the Tsar may not do: not one jot or tittle of the God-given inheritance of Autocracy must be yielded up." Thus the Tsar is bound hand and foot, and we are governed not by law but by

caprice ! Thus also there can never be reform until these things are changed. Who shall change them for us ?

‘ Brothers, there is no one to help us, but we shall help ourselves. We moujiks have slept long enough ; it is time that we awoke. We in Petersburg are already awaking ; throughout Russia the spirit of protest moves. Have you heard the sound of birds in the woods in the early morning in the spring time ? Every bird has then a voice and sings to the rising sun. So we Russians are stirring ; we sing softly to-day, but to-morrow our voices will be louder. We shall cry with ten million throats ; we shall say, “ Why must we lie for ever under the heels of a few Grand Dukes and a Pobiedonostsef ? We do not desire a Republic ; let the Tsar govern us, if he chooses, but let him be Tsar indeed, and not a feather that is blown this way and that by every Grand Seigneur whose will is stronger than his own. Let the Tsar govern us, if he will—for he is set over us by right Divine—but let him read the writing on the wall, let him open his ears and his eyes ; there is something to see and to hear : this noise is the sound of the uprising of a great people, not the complaining voice of a few malcontents ; the onward rush of a great

flood that will sweep away all things that lie in the channel which it has chosen for its course.”’

When Boyarof resumed his seat two or three men sprang to their feet and began to speak together. With difficulty two were induced to give way. The third continued his speech, the first portion of which had been drowned in the general hubbub.

‘I was saying,’ he was now heard to shout, ‘that the last speaker’s words are milk, but we to-day require strong drink. A few Grand Dukes, he hints, must be ended or mended. Ay! the whole wolf’s-litter, say I! Shall I remind you, brothers, of a few of the things these men have done, these cousins and uncles of the Tsar? Remember first, that every day each one of them eats and drinks luxuriously, while we starve upon black bread. The daily cost of the food and drink of one of these men would support a thousand of us. The money which pays for their luxuries is wrung from the hearts of the people or stolen from the nation by the sale of concessions, by the misappropriation of money given by the charitable for the use of the wounded, by the treacherous sale of military secrets to Germany, and so forth. Why, these men have been convicted of such things! Our

newspapers dare not tell us the truth, because they are gagged in order that the nation may be robbed and misgoverned for the benefit of the few. A revolution will clear the air, and we shall have it; but meanwhile let us make a black list; let us place upon it first every Romanof at this moment alive; next every minister who has proved himself an enemy of the people—oh, there are many sinners besides those whom Boyarof has enumerated—we shall make a complete list of them. Some we shall destroy, some we shall employ in order to turn their knowledge to our own purposes. Let us discriminate between the innocent and the guilty. These are innocent: Witte, Sviatopolk-Mirsky, Troubetzkoy, Yablokof, Lamsdorf, and other lesser men. These may yet be useful to us, though some of them have shown themselves cowardly at an emergency; but the Grand Dukes, Pobiedonostsef—arch-demon of anti-reform; Alexeyeff, who with Bezobrazof and the Grand Dukes is responsible for the detestable war—these and a hundred others are our enemies; these are the guilty.’

A third member rose and spoke. ‘An autocrat,’ he said, ‘as autocrat, is responsible for all that is done by his officials. These men have not a free hand. If the Tsar did not

approve of their actions, they could not act. Let us recognise this fact. Therefore the Tsar is not to be held irresponsible. Is he innocent because this Grand Duke or that is able to persuade him that for the good of his family and dynasty the inclination to grant this reform or that must be suppressed? What is his family to us? What is he himself unless autocracy in his hands be a safe instrument of government? I say that in his hands it has failed. The Tsar must be deprived of the autocratic power which in his hands has become a danger to the nation. Do you suppose that such men as I have mentioned—Witte, Troubetzkoy and others, the flower of Bureaucracy—do you suppose that they are any more satisfied with the present state of affairs than we are? I say, brothers, that they are not. I declare also that no minister of to-day is responsible for the disasters, whether at home or in the Far East, from which we are now suffering. There must be an end to these things and to the Government of Caprice, to the prostitution of the rights of a great nation to the interests of one family.'

A fourth speaker was no less emphatically convinced as to the necessity for strong measures.

‘If we were free men, brothers,’ he said, ‘I for one should be the last of all to advocate violence and bloodshed, for which I have a constitutional loathing. But we lack freedom, and for freedom, which is vital to our comfort and very existence—if existence is to be worth having—we must fight. Lying, as we do, under the heel of a despotic and irresponsible system of government, by whose arbitrary laws discussion of our wrongs is made illegal, how can such a fight for freedom be fought excepting by violence? We lie suffocated under a great weight of officialism, so that our voices cannot be heard by the world around us. Our newspapers cannot help us; they may not speak of our grievances; we may not discuss them; how then can there be even a beginning of better things? Those ministers who have dared at the risk of place and fortune, perhaps of personal freedom, to speak of our woes and of the need for reform, have been quickly silenced because, as a brother has rightly said, the family of the Tsar, who might otherwise have listened to the cry of the people, will have no reform. Alas! there is no other way but violence, my brothers; I would to God there were!’

Now these four speakers were genuine

patriots, true members of the disaffected; the fifth, who now rose to his feet, was a spy of the Department, an Agent Provocateur, a very crafty individual, Bezstidnik.

This man, whose good faith was not suspected, uttered the most inflammatory speech of the day. He called upon all who had not yet spoken to rise and confirm the words of patriotism and wisdom so ably spoken by those who had already addressed the meeting. He ended thus :

‘If there are spies among us, let them do their worst. I will tell you how we shall know which of us are the tools of the Government, and which are true men. The true men will be denounced and arrested, for that we are prepared; but if any one speaks as we speak and is not arrested, then we shall know that it is he who has denounced the rest. Now that I have said this, I think such a man, if he be among us, will not dare to reveal himself by giving us into the hands of our enemies.’

Two or three speakers followed, and the meeting, from the point of view of the authorities, was a great success, for Bezstidnik had been able to weed out seven of the most dangerous members of a dangerous society. He scored

doubly, moreover, for after handing in his list to the Departmental Chief, he begged that functionary for Heaven's sake to arrest him also, with the rest, explaining his reason, which caused the Chief not a little amusement. He felt considerable admiration, moreover, for the skill of his employee.

CHAPTER XXIX

ALL this time Pavlof had heard nothing of Nathalie's whereabouts, neither had he succeeded in finding any trace of Father Gavril, or of persuading any person in authority to interest himself in securing justice for Matrona. The separation from Nathalie had become very painful to him. He had realised that the last conversation between them, on the eve of her disappearance, must have been more than painful to her. She had taken it for granted that he had been well aware of her relations with Maximilian, but he had betrayed horror upon being informed of the true state of affairs; this had shamed and pained her even more than she had revealed, and Volodia now felt assured that, at whatever cost to her feelings, Nathalie would never, if she could help it, submit herself to the shame of seeing him again.

Gradually all these troubles weighed so heavily upon him that he grew somewhat out of love with life and became restless. In common with every other Russian, he had

lately felt his old sense of discontent and desire for reform deepen into sentiments more bitter and pronounced. Vladimir's Day gave new impetus to this development. Personally averse to violent methods, there was no danger of his lapsing gradually into the ranks of the assassination-mongers; he disapproved altogether of this kind of terrorism, and anathematised such methods at every opportunity. Moreover, the Romanofs were not a cowardly race, as he well knew; the bomb-throwers might succeed in ridding the world of two or three of the most detested of the Tsar's entourage, but—*cui bono*? So long as the military arm remained faithful to the Government the death of a few individuals would not alter the general complexion of affairs. Volodia had a theory with regard to the Army. As the revolutionary party, he said, distributed propagandists among the operatives in mill and factory, 'so let us moderates proceed with the regiments: in each regiment a few carefully selected propagandists may in time perform the miracle which was brought about with the proletariat. In process of time the Army will march over into the opposite camp.'

'Not the Cossacks,' Pavlof was assured, but even here he differed.

‘Barbarians know enough to discern when the butter is spread on the other side of the bread,’ he replied. ‘The Cossacks will go with the rest. Russian soldiers will not obey for ever those who bid them shoot down their brothers, fathers, sisters, and mothers—bah! our propagandists have plenty of arguments since Vladimir Sunday.’

One day Volodia met Ivan Zaitzoff, the quondam peasant whose misfortunes at the village had driven him into the arms of the more extreme revolutionists in St. Petersburg.

Zaitzoff appeared to be in great spirits, and Volodia, more anxious than ever at this time to learn the exact opinions of the members of every department of thought, invited him into a tea-shop for a talk.

‘You run a bit of a risk, you know,’ said Ivan; ‘I expect I am watched.’

‘Why, what have you been up to?’ asked Pavlof. ‘Nothing rash, I hope.’

‘Devil take it, no, not yet. But our meetings are spied upon—not from within—we are very select! but informers have been recognised watching some of us to our meeting-place.’

‘Then I hope the meeting did not come off?’

‘Oh, what do *you* think? Not there and not then, but we have had our great Sobranye, and some pretty serious matters have been decided upon. I may tell you this, there were seven of us who volunteered for jobs, and I was one. We could have done with seventeen.’

‘Holy Saints—what do you mean?’ asked Volodia aghast. ‘Do I understand you that *seven* persons are already scheduled for assassination?’

‘*Seven*? Why, as I say, we shall want many more volunteers; names are coming in, we shall have plenty, but these seven are to be the first.’

‘Zaitzoff, the system is wrong right through. If not too late, reconsider. Have we ever gained by violence? I think not. After Alexander came the blackest period of tyranny and oppression. After Plehve has come Trepof——’

‘Who is one of the seven, of course,’ laughed Ivan. ‘Yours is a familiar argument to us all; but the answer is good also—namely, that after these men you spoke of there still remained Pobiedonostsef, the Grand Dukes, and others; if these had not remained there would have followed neither black periods of tyranny nor Trepof and such vermin. Well, maybe

none of them will remain long, and then we shall see——’

‘Who are the seven?’ asked Volodia.

‘Oh, there is no harm in telling you; they are all to be warned—let them prepare for the next world. We are merciful, our set; we do not war against their souls! Well, of course, Apollon, and Trepof, and Poseidon, and Nikifor, and Pobiedonostsef; these are the first five. It is felt that without these to stifle him our poor little Big One may breathe more freely. Then there is Maximilian——’

Volodia started violently, uttering an oath.

‘Not Maximilian!’ he muttered. ‘Why—why, Zaitzoff? What has *he* done amiss?’

‘Devil take it—what do I know? It is not my affair; I am only a volunteer. He is a Grand Duke, that is enough for some. Nevertheless, I heard the arguments. He has offended, I think, by disappointing hopes rather than by active ill-doing. It was hoped that he would use his influence on the side of reform since he has more than once shown himself, in former days, to be liberally inclined. Yet on every occasion he supports the rest. He goes with the tide, when he should attempt to stem it.’

‘I understand. Well, and the last?’

‘A mere provincial—the governor of a city, who is a devil of the first magnitude. You see, therefore, that being one of the seven volunteers, I am now enjoying, like my victim, my last few days or weeks upon earth. It is an odd feeling but not unattractive. I am hoping that my victim and I will pass out of the world together; we shall argue, I dare say, as we journey together through space, of the rights and wrongs of my action. In this world such a conversation could never take place, because he is an aristocrat and would disdain to open his lips to me, but there it will be different. We shall be friendly, I have no personal animosity against him, and he will perhaps know it; we shall converse friendly and familiarly, for as spirits we shall, I suppose, be equal. I, Ivan Zaitzoff, peasant, and Maximilian, Grand Duke of the Russian Empire.’

Volodia laughed. ‘So you have been appointed to make an end of his Imperial Highness! How, by bomb?’

‘Not I; I have a better plan. Fortune has been in this matter so strongly on my side that I feel that my little enterprise is, doubtless for good reasons, approved by the Higher powers. I suppose you may be trusted?’

‘Why not? I am not one to speak of matters which do not concern me.’

‘Then I will tell you; it is an amusing tale. Upon being appointed to this little office, it appeared to me advisable that I should study the daily routine of my friend in order that I might gradually formulate my arrangements for the fulfilment of my duties. Such affairs, you know, are usually planned abroad; my plan is home-made! Well, said an acquaintance to me, there is a house in the Galernaya at which he may often be seen to arrive, generally at dusk. There is a lady—a Madame Oodine—a friend, you understand——’

‘Yes,’ Volodia gasped; ‘go on.’

‘Well, I took the address and the name of the lady, and in the evening I visited the Galernaya, standing about close to the entrance of the house named. A fat over-dressed schweitzer saw me loitering, which proves that I am a tyro in the art and must practise a while before my day. “Well, what do you want?” says he. “I have a message for Madame Oodine,” says I. “Oh,” says he, “have you? Well, she left the house six weeks ago, so you can move on, unless you’d like me to introduce you to the notice of the policeman at the corner there.”’

CHAPTER XXX

IVAN paused, and Pavlof waited in an agony of suspense. Obviously this murderous rascal had information up his sleeve which might prove of the very highest interest and importance to him. He did his best, however, to betray no agitation, lest Ivan should take fright and the current of his confidences be stayed. Zaitzoff laughed and continued:—

‘Well, you would say this check would have closed up *that* channel of information as to our little Maximilian’s habits of life, but my day of good luck had dawned. I met my friend again and abused him. “You’re a nice sort of a man to give accurate information,” said I; “the woman in the Galernaya has left six weeks ago.”’

“Well, I’m glad I met you,” he replied, “for I told Tuzof what I had said to you, and he told me I was behind the times. The Galernaya lady deserted him and disappeared, no one knows why, and Maximilian is said to be very mad. He can get no trace of

her, and the funny part of it all is that little Densky has seen her, he told me so only to-day. You'd better talk to Densky." Then I went to Densky, and the result is that I've got the woman's address in my pocket.'

'Holy Saints, what luck you have!' exclaimed Volodia, endeavouring to mask his real excitement by a display of surprise and amusement. 'Then you ought to have no difficulty in arranging your little affair.'

'I turned the matter over, and I may tell you I have thought of a pretty good way of doing it; in fact, it should be so easy and simple that I may even do the trick and get away scot-free! Now then, what about my day of luck? Usually, as I say, these little affairs are arranged by agents abroad, ingenious chaps good at planning and so on, but I don't think my little scheme can be improved upon.'

'You certainly have had wonderful luck; it should be a good augury. You're going to tell Maximilian her address, and catch him as he goes to see her, is that it?'

'Pretty nearly. I won't tell you more, because I'd rather not trust my own father with the details, for fear he should talk in his sleep.'

‘What, am I a suspicious character? You should know me by now. I never talk in my sleep—you’re quite safe. I thought I might perhaps help in the way of concocting a letter or something of that sort; you’re not much of a writer, and might make a muddle of it. However——’

‘Yes; there’s truth in that; the letter *is* written and is in my pocket. If only you hadn’t preached me that sermon about bombs and so on——’

‘I don’t approve of individual murders, that must stand; but if the man is to be assassinated and by you—and I suppose you don’t mean to be persuaded against it?’

‘Not if all the Angels, Archangels, Saints, Martyrs, and Apostles came and begged me to desist.’

‘Well, I was going to say, if the thing must happen, I’d rather you escaped than fell into the hands of the police; rather one violent death than two. A little muddling or misspelling in the letter, and the Grand Duke might become suspicious—might take fright—spies would be posted, and so forth, and you would get into quite unnecessary trouble.’

‘Yes, all that is true. Well, you shall see the letter; here it is—badly written and misspelt

probably; I am not much of a gramatny! Read it—the idea is a good one at any rate.’

Volodia read the letter, which was, indeed, shockingly written and spelt. In it Ivan had represented himself as a humble friend of Nathalie. ‘She has hidden herself from you in a moment of indignation,’ he wrote, ‘and though now anxious to be received back into your favour is deterred by a feeling of false shame. If your Highness will visit her at nine o’clock on Thursday evening next, I venture to assure your Highness that you will find the lady more than happy to welcome you. The address is Zagamehl Street, No. 22, lodging No. 14.’

‘Good—the writing is bad and will not do, but the idea is excellent. Have you a woman who would copy this for you—one who may be trusted?’

‘A woman? *Vzdor!* Why a woman? You can write it as well as any woman. Why should I risk more and more?’

‘I will tell you. The letter should be unsigned, but written in a woman’s hand. She would have a lady’s maid, in her position; the Grand Duke would probably know the woman, and would at once conclude that she had written it. This would do away with sus-

picion, for all would appear very natural. I will write it fairly for you and you can let some woman of your company copy it out.'

Ivan approved of the idea and took his departure, carrying his fair copy of the fateful letter.

Then Volodia went home and embarked upon the profoundest bout of thinking in which he had ever yet indulged. This most fortunate encounter with Ivan could scarcely be considered less than providential. He reviewed the several new situations created by Ivan's revelations.

Firstly, he now knew where Nathalie was to be found. Secondly, the Grand Duke was also to be informed of her address. Thirdly, when lured by Ivan to the house in which she lived, the Grand Duke would be assassinated in cold blood.

With regard to the first item, Volodia's first impulse was to hasten to the address at which he should find Nathalie. He was no longer under any doubt as to his feelings for this woman: he loved her with all his soul. The fact that she had been betrayed by a Grand Duke made no difference. All Russia suffered, in different ways, from the Grand Dukes. Nathalie was to be pitied, not de-

spised—God forbid! Certainly love should not be withheld from her on this account. He would rush to her and tell her so, at once, before this horrible Thursday which was to be Maximilian's last day on earth. They would disappear together into safety. Maximilian could be warned. He should be saved this time, afterwards he must take care of himself.

Then objections to this plan began to push themselves forward.

Matrona, who was his wife, was suffering punishment for a crime which she had not committed. He had already wronged her sufficiently—how should he add wrong to wrong?

The Grand Duke, if warned, would set on foot inquiries at the stated place and hour; Zaitzoff would be caught and condemned; this would be rank treachery.

Nathalie had not sent Volodia her address, therefore obviously she did not wish him to know it.

On the other hand the Grand Duke must of course be warned. It was quite impossible to allow him to be deliberately shot or stabbed without a word sent in warning.

‘Of course he is nothing to me,’ Volodia assured himself. ‘But if he were the most

insignificant person on this earth and a stranger I should be a scoundrel indeed if I allowed this assassin to have his will of him.'

'Well, Zaitzoff shall not have him,' he concluded. 'Maximilian shall live, but I will have terms. It shall be a matter of *quid* for *quo*; he shall give me Matrona's pardon and Zaitzoff shall go free, and Nathalie—neither of us shall see her.'

Nathalie would not know his handwriting; he sat down and wrote instantly to her:

'Do not remain where you are now hiding—the Big One has found you; go quickly.'

He posted the letter at once. 'At least that is a safe move!' he reflected. 'The best for all three of them!'

Unfortunately the letter came into the hands of Lizette, who, seeing that the writing was that of a man, could not resist the pleasure of first peep at the contents of the envelope. Lizette was an adept in the art of opening envelopes in such a manner that it was impossible to discover that they had been opened, once they were safely stuck down again. She employed hot steam, and having read the contents of the letter she sat down to think—a process which did not occupy many minutes.

To Lizette it had appeared both a profound

personal grievance to herself and also a great calamity for her mistress that, owing to her foolish fancy for a younger man, Madame had—in a fit of madness—offended her powerful friend and protector by breaking off all relations with him and disappearing. It had occurred to her many times to acquaint the Grand Duke with the new address; but Madame had from the first been so violent in her threats and so eloquent in her entreaties that Lizette should not reveal her secret, that the girl had hesitated to take what she believed to be the best course in her mistress's interests, at least for the present. She had indulged Madame. For a month or two she should have her will; after a decent interval Lizette promised herself that the Big One should return; Madame was a fool. If she did not know on which side her bread—and Lizette's—was buttered, then it was time some one who did know should take the matter in hand.

And now had come this letter which would save her the pain of writing to his Highness, and also leave her conscience void of offence against her mistress.

So the letter went into the stove quickly enough.

'There is only one who could have written

it,' she reflected; 'and he is not one to be encouraged!'

'Mon Dieu!' she muttered presently, 'how then did *he* discover? and since he knew, why did not the fool come? I should not welcome him, but there is one who would!'

Lizette laughed with great satisfaction.

'Well, now he will be too late if he comes!' she reflected; 'the Big One will see to that!'

CHAPTER XXXI

PAVLOF, unwilling to run the many risks involved in a letter of warning, which might never be read by the person to be warned, or if read might bring the writer into trouble, and which would certainly bring disaster upon Zaitzoff, decided to wait until the evening of Thursday, and then, an hour or so before the time appointed for his visit to Nathalie, repair to the Grand Duke's palace and demand an interview with him.

Thursday came and Volodia repaired to the palace. But the grand ducal palaces had become, since Vladimir's Day, the abodes of fear and suspicion. No unknown persons were allowed to enter so much as the outer yard, until their harmlessness should have been amply proved. Pavlof demanded admittance at a side entrance, the porter in charge of the door being an old acquaintance, Gregory. Gregory started back upon seeing him, for, be it remembered, the Jaeger Volodia Pavlof had died many months ago at the hands, or claws, of a bear.

‘Yes, I am come to life again,’ he laughed. ‘Fear nothing, Gregory; only send word quickly to his Imperial Highness that the Jaeger Volodia Pavlof has come to life, and would see him.’

‘But *Chort Vozmee*, you are dead nearly a year ago; how do I know it is you?’

‘It is I; I remained alive, but disappeared for private reasons. Go, my friend, and tell his Highness—it is a matter of life and death.’

‘Life and death—why? Holy Saints!—is he threatened? They say there have been warnings.’

‘Send quickly and waste no time—yes, he is in danger, I have come to warn him.’

Gregory went away crossing himself. He had hardly returned, when the footman he had sent to the Grand Duke came also, inviting ‘the Jaeger Pavlof’ to follow him upstairs.

The Grand Duke was in his cabinet alone.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you have not turned Anarchist, I trust, and come to murder me?’

‘On the contrary, Highness, I have come to save you from a danger.’

‘What danger? I have been warned, it is true, but——’

‘Highness, you have received a letter purporting to invite you to visit a certain lady,

whose whereabouts has for some time been a mystery to you ——’ Volodia paused.

‘Well, I know not how you should be aware of it, excepting from herself, or Lizette, but it is true. Proceed.’

‘I have not seen Madame, nor Lizette. The letter is from one who has designs upon your life; it is a scheme to persuade you to be in a certain place at a certain time.’

‘Bah! I see through your plan, my friend. It is to your advantage, perhaps, that Madame and I should be kept apart.’

‘Highness, with respect, that is not the question. I would prefer that you should not meet; that, I think, you know already. I may add that the moment that I learned Madame’s address, I wrote advising her to disappear a second time, because her whereabouts had become known to you; therefore, in all probability she is no longer at the house named in your letter.’ The Grand Duke frowned.

‘Stop! If not from Madame, from whom did you know of this letter?’

‘From him who sent it—the man who has been appointed your assassin.’

‘Are you, then, an Anarchist?’

‘No; I am, of course, for reform and a change of government—who in Russia is not,

to-day? With this man I was acquainted, and by accident I have become aware of his intentions. Believe me or not, but it is true.'

'It is an unlikely tale. Whether true or not, it matters little. I shall not be deterred by your story. Though I do not wholly believe it, I may take precautions.'

'You will ignore my warning and go?'

'Certainly.'

'Highness, reflect. I am deeply in earnest. Your life is without doubt at stake—you go to almost certain death. It is a carefully-laid plot.'

'I am not convinced. Explain, if you can, why you have warned me.'

'That is easy—for two reasons. The first, because I hoped for reward; the second, because—well—perhaps you will understand that though the honour has not been claimed by either side, there exists a certain tie——'

The Grand Duke laughed. 'You are very frank to-day,' he said. 'As to the first reason—reward for information; what reward did you seek?'

'First, that you would exert your influence to obtain a pardon for my wife, who suffers for no crime of her own.'

'Stop! do you love the woman? If I were

to obtain this pardon you demand, would you restore to her her position as your wife? If so——’

‘Highness, I understand the meaning of your remark. I do not love my wife, but I seek justice for her because I consider myself responsible in a measure for her misfortunes. Whether I shall restore her to her position or not will depend upon circumstances; it is possible—I do not yet know.’

‘Promise that you will do so, and I shall find means to obtain pardon for her.’

‘No, with respect; I decline to be driven.’

‘You are obstinate! Well, and the second demand—the first, you see, has failed.’

‘That you will interfere no more with Nathalie Oodine who——’

The Grand Duke interrupted with a loud laugh. ‘Who is to be reserved for the pleasure of Monsieur Volodia Pavlof. Go away, sir; your plot is a thin one, I see through it very easily. Your mission has failed. I will enter into no compact with you—why, it is within half an hour of my appointment with this very lady.’

‘Highness, for the last time I solemnly warn you that I speak truth—you go into danger, perhaps death.’

The Grand Duke touched a bell and a footman opened the door. There was no mistaking the invitation to depart. Volodia bowed and retired. The horror of the situation lay upon his soul as he walked down the stairs. Maximilian, who, after all, had certain putative claims upon his regard and duty, insisted upon going to his death; the Romanofs are no cowards and are not easily persuaded of danger. He would almost certainly keep the appointment made. He might make a concession to discretion by sending a gendarme or two in advance to see that the approach to Nathalie's house was safe; but in that case Zaitzoff would suffer, which would be rank treachery. 'No—I must go—I must be there first!' he reflected.

Down the handsome flight of stairs he sped to the side exit, the Grand Duke's private door, at which Gregory presided. Gregory had a little office in the space between the outer and inner doors; he was sitting in it at this moment. Volodia, being an old friend, asked admittance, which was accorded willingly, the more so because Gregory, being a Russian and therefore among the most inquisitive of mortal men, was anxious to know more of this mystery of Pavlof's quasi death and the details of the

bear-story. But Volodia had other matters to speak of. He was pale and agitated.

‘Gregory,’ he said, speaking rapidly in a whisper, though the doors were all closed, ‘it is a matter of life and death; I came to warn his Highness, but he will not be warned. In a few minutes he will drive away into great danger, perhaps death. He is threatened with assassination.’

‘*Boje moy!*’ exclaimed Gregory, crossing himself; ‘I knew it—who would be a Grand Duke to-day?’

‘Listen, I discovered this plot accidentally, but he will not be alarmed, and insists upon going, the inducement being, you will understand, a lady—tell me, is the sledge waiting?’

‘Yes, it has been here for five minutes.’

‘Who drives it to-night?’

‘André.’

‘Good. Listen, Gregory; the Grand Duke must not go, but go he will if we permit it, you and I; let us not permit it. He is a good master and the best of the Grand Dukes—too good to die. See now, give me an old shooba of his Highness. I will put it on and jump into the sledge, you holding open the covering, as though I were his Highness himself, do you

CHAPTER XXXII

THE Grand Duke Maximilian drove fine horses ; he was, indeed, notorious as the possessor of some of the finest trotters in St. Petersburg. André sent his animal scuttling over the hard snow roads in a way that made Volodia's face tingle in the biting north wind, and set his brain working very clearly and acutely.

This enterprise upon which he was engaged might of course end in sudden disaster for him ; Volodia was quite aware of that. Naturally, he did not intend to be blown to pieces by a bomb, or stabbed or shot, if he could help it ; but there was risk, great risk, and for this he was prepared. He had, in fact, come to draw the shot which was intended to kill the Grand Duke, unless he could somehow first arrest the hand that would fire it. Dressed as he was in the fur mantle of his Imperial Highness, a gorgeous garment though a discarded one, and being, as he knew, quite remarkably like Maximilian, the risk would be the greater. Moreover, even though he succeeded in stopping Zaitzoff before

he should have time to strike his blow, there was still grave risk ; for Zaitzoff would naturally imagine that Volodia had played him false, and would, as likely as not, being more than half a savage, wreak instant vengeance upon him, without waiting for a possible explanation of the apparent treachery.

The more he reviewed the situation, the greater seemed his peril, yet strangely enough Volodia bore André no grudge for driving him so rapidly into the jaws of possible death.

‘It might have been the Big One !’ he reflected. ‘And for him the result would have been certain !’

Volodia rarely thought of Maximilian’s relationship to himself ; the connection was more disgrace to him than honour. His attitude towards the Grand Duke was this. Here was a man who had betrayed his mother ; should this consideration cause him to feel respect for that man ? His rank made no difference.

The man had been kind to him, no doubt, and their relations had been friendly. Volodia did not dislike the Grand Duke ; on the contrary, though he disapproved of many things about him, he could not help feeling attracted, in some subtle fashion, by his personality. Comparing him with other Grands Seigneurs of the

empire, the uncles and first cousins of the Tsar, whom of course he only knew from hearsay, Volodia could scarcely help realising that here was a broader, more sympathetic mind, a far more attractive personality.

At the present moment he was conscious of something quite new and unexpected. Was it a dormant feeling of affection, he wondered, a blood-sympathy which asserted itself now in this hour of danger, in spite of all that had gone before to crush and destroy the sentiment?

‘Nonsense!’ he reflected; ‘it is nothing of the sort; one would do the same for any man who stood in horrible dread of assassination. Moreover, if I were to save him now, in spite of himself, he would, if I know his character, which is a generous and manly one when stripped of its veneer of grand ducal dragoonism and hauteur, grant me my petitions—Matrona’s pardon, at any rate, and perhaps the other; yes, that is why I am doing this—in the hope of reward. If I should be blown to pieces now, in place of himself, I do not doubt that he would grant both my petitions, even though I should no longer be there to demand them. He is generous enough for that!’

Then he began to think of their relations—his and Maximilian’s—as long as he could

remember. His Highness had always been kindly disposed. He had paid for his education ; he had offered him excellent things—a commission in the Guards, a nomination for the page corps, a position in one of the Departments. Volodia had refused all these things. The Grand Duke could not recognise him openly, therefore he would make no pretence of belonging to the higher caste ; he would remain in the station of life to which he had been born. He loved the forests, and in the capacity of forester he had started the serious business of life. For this position and the excellent salary attached, he had been indebted to his Highness.

How had he repaid all this kindness, which evidently sprang, as Volodia could plainly perceive, from a sympathetic regard for the son of a woman who had once been dear to him, perhaps also from some little personal liking for himself? Well, Volodia had held severely aloof, offering in return no more than the cold respect which was due to a Grand Seigneur who was also employer and master. More than this he had been too proud to reveal, even though he knew that from time to time he had felt, in spite of himself, a responsive sympathy for the man. In this he had shown more false pride

than the Grand Duke himself—a Grand Seigneur, and he a nobody !

The big black horse with flowing tail—one of the fastest trotters in the city—covered the two miles which lay between the Palace Quay and Zagamehl Street, in spite of obstructions and even stoppages, so rapidly, that Volodia had not reached the conclusion of his reflections, when he suddenly realised that the moment had almost arrived in which his fate would be put to the touch—in another minute it must be proved whether he should live or die. Here was Zagamehl Street. No. 22 was at the farther end, a circumstance which caused Pavlof a feeling of anger, for he disliked the suspense of this last moment or two.

As he passed a lamp-post, or rather just after he had passed it, a man standing with his back against it flourished a handkerchief before applying it to his nose.

Another man, standing in the doorway of No. 22, fifty yards farther along, perceived the signal, and fled quickly up the stairs—dirty, badly lighted, stone steps, such as form the approach to all houses of the second rate in St. Petersburg. He ran rapidly up two flights, and hid himself in a shadowy corner of the landing which was just outside the door of Nathalie's flat.

A moment later Volodia stepped from the sledge and entered the entrance-hall below. There was no schweitzer to guide the inquiring visitor, or if one should have been at hand, he had been squared—at any rate, he was absent.

Volodia looked up the stairs and into the gloomy recess that frowned blindly at him from the farther end of the entrance-hall. There was no one to be seen.

‘He is in the actual lodging, then,’ he reflected; ‘that will give me a better chance of escape; for I shall ring the bell, and as the door opens I shall shout to Zaitzoff. “Don’t shoot,” I shall say; “it is not the Grand Duke!”’

He climbed the stairs slowly, looking at the number over each door.

As he stretched his hand to reach the bell at the entrance to Nathalie’s flat, he heard a rustle behind him.

Instantly it occurred to him that after all the assassin was lurking here, and that he had made a muddle of the business. Without turning, he spoke aloud and quickly.

‘Zaitzoff, don’t fire,’ he began; ‘the Grand Duke has——’

The exclamation saved his life, for it caused

Zaitzoff's hand to swerve in an attempt to deflect the bullet; but it was too late to prevent the shot. Volodia felt a twinge of pain in his back near the shoulder. Zaitzoff sprang to his side and held him.

‘Good God, Pavlof!’ he exclaimed; ‘what’s the meaning of this?’

‘Run, quickly,’ Volodia gasped; ‘the Grand Duke has been warned. I came to tell you; you must escape at once.’

‘Bah! I am not quite such a scoundrel as that,’ Zaitzoff laughed. ‘Of course I did not know it was you; my accomplice signalled that the Grand Duke approached. I will see you placed in safety.’

‘Ring the bell, then, and depart quickly. Set me down; I will sit and wait. Some one will come——’

Volodia looked like fainting. Zaitzoff considered a moment. Then he rang a violent peal upon the bell and bolted like a hare.

The door opened and Lizette looked out. She heard the sound of retreating footsteps, and saw the body of a man lying at her very feet.

‘Madame!’ she shrieked; ‘come quickly; there is a tragedy—it is the Grand Duke—he is murdered!’

CHAPTER XXXIII

NATHALIE rushed to the threshold. Both women had heard the sound of a pistol shot, but St. Petersburg was at present a city of alarms, and such sounds had grown more or less familiar during the last week or two, so that they did not dream that a tragedy had been enacted close to their own doors.

Lizette was bending over the body, weeping aloud, and Nathalie bent with her.

In a moment she had pushed the whimpering girl aside.

‘You fool! it is not the Grand Duke,’ she muttered. ‘Have you no eyes? Thank God, he is not dead. The wound is here, close to the shoulder. He has fainted. Help me; we will carry him within. Place him upon this low divan, so. Now run, Lizette, for a doctor—ask at the *Aptéka* at the corner where the nearest is to be found.’

Lizette departed, white and frightened, but thanking *le bon Dieu* that at least it was not the Grand Duke who was killed, or near it,

but only the youth who had so deeply injured her mistress by coming between her obvious interests and herself.

Left alone with Volodia, Nathalie bent and kissed his white face and closed eyes. 'The first and also the last time,' she told herself; 'there is no harm, for he will never know.'

The wound was bleeding profusely, and she did what she could to check the flow. She knew enough of anatomy to be confident that the injury was not a mortal one. She thanked God that if he must be wounded, it had happened at her own threshold. As to the why and the how, such questions could wait—must wait, though she longed to know how he had discovered her address, why he had come, and who could have done him this cruel injury.

The doctor came presently. He found two figures standing over the unconscious third; one, though he could scarcely believe it possible, looked like the Grand Duke Maximilian. He did what was necessary for the patient, and went away wondering greatly. At the outer door stood two sledges, either of which might have been a grand ducal equipage; and his wonder grew apace.

When Volodia opened his eyes he was

vaguely conscious of two things—pain in his shoulder, or near it, and of a group of people standing over his bed. Where was he, and who were they? The light was faint; it came from a pink-shaded lamp. Who *were* these people, and what had happened?

‘See, he opens his eyes, Madame,’ said a voice suddenly, which he instantly recognised as Lizette’s.

‘*Slávo tebe, Hóspode!*’ exclaimed Nathalie. ‘Thanks be to God!’ and Volodia recognised her voice also. Was this a dream?

‘Volodia, my friend,’ said the Grand Duke, ‘do you know us? I am Maximilian. The bullet which has passed through your shoulder should have lodged in my heart. You have played the hero, my friend!’

Volodia only stared, but memory was coming back to him very slowly. ‘Take care, Highness,’ he murmured; ‘do not go. I know what I know; you are warned!’

‘You saved me, *mon brave!* I would not accept your warning, therefore you took the risk upon yourself. Some assassin, intending to murder me, has shot you instead. I misjudged and wronged you. Thank God, that you have escaped death at least.’

Volodia lay and thought. This was certainly

the Grand Duke Maximilian. Why, then, was he lying at ease here, while the Grand Duke stood? He could not make out what his Highness was talking about, but this was certainly his voice. What shocking manners, to sit while his Highness stood!

Volodia tried to start to his feet, uttering a mumbled apology; a fearful spasm of pain arrested him, and he fell back. '*Bóje moy!*' he exclaimed; 'what is the matter with me?' Then he fainted a second time.

'I will return and send my own doctor,' said Maximilian. 'It is well that I have found you, Nathalie; you did foolishly to disappear. To-morrow you shall explain your motives. Meanwhile, the boy is in good hands. Lizette will open the door for me.'

The Grand Duke's own doctor arrived and stayed some time. He had attended Nathalie before this day, and they were old acquaintances. He soon put matters upon a better footing as far as the patient was concerned. He would do well in a day or two, but must be absolutely quiet.

Nathalie begged the doctor with tears in her eyes to forbid the Grand Duke to visit the wounded man. 'Tell his Highness,' she entreated, 'that the excitement would be

fatal to the youth.' The old man looked grave.

'The Grand Duke will desire to come,' he said, 'for more reasons than one. I might beg him to keep away for two days.'

'Then at least do that. I would sooner die, Doctor, than renew my former relations with his Highness.'

'I see, I see. I did not know that it was so. I will do what I can. How did this tragedy happen? Who shot this youth? His likeness to his Highness is remarkable.

Maximilian had frankly described the matter to Nathalie as he believed it to have happened. She now passed on the story to the doctor.

'A most heroic deed,' said the old man, gazing admiringly at the now sleeping patient. 'Failing to alarm his Imperial Highness, he braved the assassin in order to preserve the more valuable life. One would think he——' The doctor did not finish his sentence.

'The likeness of the young man to the older one is very remarkable,' he added, after a pause.

'It would account for the act of self-sacrifice,' he added again, after a second pause, but without explaining what he meant. Soon after this he went downstairs, murmuring, '*Pauvre*

enfant! So that is why the relations were broken off!’

When Volodia next opened his eyes he was alone with Nathalie. This time his brain was clear, and after staring in her face for a few minutes, he spoke.

‘Nathalie!’ he exclaimed, and she started round, her face flushing.

‘Yes, it is I,’ she said. She laid her hand upon his forehead. ‘Do not move,’ she smiled; ‘it is forbidden.’

‘Nathalie, I did not expect to see you here. I wrote to warn you.’

‘I received no letter.’

‘Then it miscarried—there are many spies at present. I warned you that his Highness had learned your address. Has he been?’

‘Yes, soon after you.’

‘Holy Saints! He was not shot at?’

‘No.’

‘And the assassin; did he escape?’

‘Presumably; nothing has been heard of him. The Grand Duke was touched by your action, and very grateful.’

‘Will he come again?’

‘He would have come again to-morrow morning, but I have begged the doctor to forbid it for two days at least.’

‘Why?’

‘O Volodia ! to see him makes me ashamed. Before these two days are finished, perhaps I shall be able to leave you.’

‘No, no, do not do that. If the Grand Duke is gratefully disposed, perhaps he will grant me a favour which I have already asked of him—to worry you no more with his attentions. I desired that you should be quit of both of us, though I hoped to see you once more. But for this disaster I suppose you would have remained hidden from me?’

Nathalie nodded. ‘So I had intended. After our last conversation, that would be better, I thought, than meeting you once more.’

‘Now I am ill,’ he said, ‘remain with me until I am well again. He cannot hurt you so long as I am here.’

‘So long as there is need of me—no longer.’

‘Are you resolved to be so unkind, Nathalie ? Why?’

‘If I am ashamed to see his Highness, I am even more ashamed in your presence.’

‘There is no need. If I made you ashamed, I must have spoken like a fool. I ought to have shown you that I pity, not blame you.’

‘No, no. Our lives must be lived apart.

Have you forgotten that there is your wife between us, as well as my shame?' Volodia winced.

'My wife? Yes, there is that—it is true. She is suffering, the poor child, for a crime which is not hers. The Grand Duke will obtain a pardon for her. He had refused, but I think he will now obtain it, in gratitude. It was worth being shot, if this poor girl gets justice done her at last. How could I be happy, having this injustice on my mind?'

Nathalie left the room without speaking, under pretence to fetch some food or medicine. She sent Lizette to take her place at the invalid's bedside, and Lizette noticed that her eyes were full of tears, a spectacle which filled her with scorn.

'It is still the same foolishness, then!' she reflected. 'Some people do not know when good fortune has returned to them! Such people do not deserve it!'

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE Grand Duke Maximilian wrote to Volodia next day; the doctor had forbidden him to come in person. This was a kind and grateful letter. He enclosed an order from the Minister of Justice for the immediate release of the convict Matrona Gavrilovna, convicted of murder, now *en route* for the Alexandrofsky prison in Irkutsk. 'This I send in token of my gratitude,' he wrote, 'but I shall find other ways of showing my appreciation. Let it be understood, however, at once, lest misunderstandings should arise, that the second of your late demands I cannot favourably consider. This is a private matter between Madame and myself, and not even my present gratitude and goodwill towards yourself are able to alter my firm conviction that no third person should attempt to interfere in this matter.'

Volodia placed both letter and pardon in Nathalie's hands.

'Read them,' he said; 'you will understand.'

Nathalie read both documents. Her face was very pale, but she said nothing.

‘I have done my best, and failed,’ he resumed. ‘It remains for you to defy or to submit.’

‘Submit!’ she repeated, speaking as though she had been struck a blow. ‘O Volodia!’

‘No, of course you will not. Forgive me, Nathalie. Of course it will be defiance; you will disappear again.’

‘Yes, and you will promise to make no effort to find me. If I need help I shall send to you at the office where you work, but I think I shall need none. As for you, you will go to Irkutsk, or wherever she may be, and you will find your wife and——’

Nathalie broke off and burst into tears, and Volodia could think of no words to comfort her. His own heart was heavy as lead.

‘You will find her,’ Nathalie resumed; ‘and by your kindness you will atone for all the injustice she has suffered. Who can do this, if not you? Who *would* do it, but you?’

‘What else could any man do? She is my wife. I did not divorce her. Like a fool I pretended to die; therefore she is still my wife. In any case I must have done my best to get justice for her. It is not a matter of love. There is no love on either side.’

‘Maybe it will come. God grant it!’

‘On my side it will never come,’ Volodia groaned. ‘When we were apart, Nathalie, I knew that I should have no peace until I found you. Now you are found, there is still no peace, because again we must part.’

‘Yes, we must part; this time, I entreat you, do not seek to find me. Do you not see how great a gulf is fixed between us?’

‘It would be no injustice to Matrona to divorce her and place her with her mother; perhaps she would be happier thus.’

‘Yes, if that were all,’ she sighed.

‘Is it not all? What else? The Grand Duke? By the Saints, Grand Seigneur though he be, he should not stand in our way!’

‘Do you not understand? He does stand in our way. Even though I should never see him more, he stands like a ghost in our path.’

‘You mean that you are ashamed of what is past.’

‘Yes, my shame; that is the ghost of the Grand Duke which obstructs our happiness. But for you, I should never have learned to be ashamed.’

‘My poor Nathalie! But see, to have learned to be ashamed, is not that to have regained

innocence, if the cause of shame has been willingly removed?’

‘Innocence? I have done with it for ever. The gulf that is fixed between you and me is my shame.’

‘But the past cannot for ever dominate the present. It shall not, Nathalie. Let us wait and see what the future may have in store for us.’

‘For me it can have nothing in store but shame—regret—misery. You will have peace, because you will forgive this wife who has wronged you and has suffered. The forgiving of wrong done and the comforting of those who have suffered, this is God-like work, and in it you shall find peace. God forbid that any thought of me—a disgraced woman—should mar that peace. You shall forget me, Volodia; that is the best, and so it shall be.’

‘You speak of what is impossible, Nathalie; you are tired out with your kindness to me, and know not what foolishness you are uttering. Sleep a while, my love, and we shall talk of these matters again when your nerves have rested.’

Nathalie smiled and left the room, and he saw her no more. She took her farewell of him while he slept, late in the afternoon, and

when Volodia awoke on the following morning, he observed to his surprise that a hospital sister sat and watched by his bedside. Nathalie and Lizette had departed, neither the nurse nor either of the two Russian servants knew whither.

Volodia, thinking over the matter, admitted, though his heart was sore enough, that under the circumstances it was perhaps wiser that Nathalie should disappear before the Grand Duke should return to the house. As for the gulf that lay between the woman he loved and himself, he did not regard it as so hopelessly unnavigable as Nathalie evidently considered it.

‘Her poor heart is very sore,’ he reflected, ‘and she has lost for the moment her self-respect. In time she will gradually find it again. Meanwhile, who am I to desire her—I whose wife lives and suffers unjustly?’

On the third day the Grand Duke paid another visit. He came expecting to see Nathalie, but found her flown. The discovery enraged him, though he would show no sign of his annoyance. When he entered the sick-room he had recovered his equanimity, having smoked a cigarette or two in the salon in order to attain that end.

Volodia had never seen him in so kind a mood.

‘I have thought much of your conduct of the other night, Volodia,’ he said; ‘you have pleased me well. I wish to God my son Anton were in your place, and you in his. If it were possible for me to recognise you I would gladly do so. It is due to you, however, to go so far in that direction as may be. I have certain plans for you—a commission in the army, a place in one of the departments. You shall choose your career for yourself, and it shall be begun under a new name, suggestive, to a certain extent, of your origin—Maximilianof—Maximof—Romanovitch—we shall hit upon one that is satisfactory. I have spoken of your heroism to his Majesty, who, though his mind is intensely occupied with other matters, was graciously pleased to speak most highly of your conduct, and to acquiesce in my wish to accord you a partial recognition.’

Volodia was touched, otherwise the resentment he felt would have found expression. He declined the offer with thanks. He would prefer to continue in that class of society to which he was accustomed as the son of Pavlof, the gardener of his Highness. If a good billet should be offering as keeper or ranger of the

forests belonging to his Highness, that might be acceptable to him later on, when he should have returned from Siberia, whither he intended to journey upon an errand of justice.

‘But the army—the departments—think of the position—the career.’

Volodia replied that he would have nothing to do with an army which had not been ashamed to shoot down the people; nor with the bureaus, which were the ruin of the country. He would not serve the Tsar under any capacity. It would not be honourable on his part, ‘considering,’ Volodia ended, ‘that I have learned to hate autocracy, and desire to see it abolished.’

Maximilian laughed, and made a show of closing his ears.

‘By all means go among your bears then and your capercailzies,’ he said. ‘So dangerous a person is better buried in the forest than at large among his fellow-men.’

Then the Grand Duke, growing suddenly grave, asked what had become of Nathalie.

‘Before God, I do not know,’ Volodia replied. ‘Does not your Highness yet realise that she is ashamed of her past life? May not a woman repent if that is her honest desire?’

The Grand Duke laughed again.

‘Repentance ! She is too young to repent ! Repentance is for the old or for the sick unto death. Well, well, let her be for the present. Maybe she will repent that she has repented ; I have seen such things !’

CHAPTER XXXV

VOLODIA set out upon his errand of justice, travelling by the Siberian railway, at this time over-crowded, over-worked, failing here and there, but still struggling to cope with the enormous strain put upon it by the constant demands of Russia's army in the East for reinforcements and for food and ammunition. There was no longer an alternative route *via* Vladivostok. But though generals and admirals of the Tsar had failed to lead their forces to victory, though fortresses had fallen, ships had been sunk, men—by tens of thousands—killed and wounded, yet one man at least had deserved well of his Tsar and country—Prince Khilkof, the manager of the Siberian railway. Among many failures he was a brilliant exception. But at this time strikes among the employees had rendered his task still more difficult. Merchants' goods lay rotting in heaps at stations and sidings, because there was no possibility of conveying them at present to their destination. The line grew more and more

congested. Many times ordinary passengers, Volodia among them, had been suddenly turned out of their railway carriages, which were required for troops or stores, and had been compelled to wait at wayside stations until there should be room or opportunity to proceed. Even the convict carriages were commandeered, and their passengers compelled to wait upon opportunity, unable to proceed upon their dismal journey.

Among a gang of prisoners turned out of a train, like himself, and huddled with their guards at the corner of a station, Volodia suddenly recognised Ivan Zaitzoff, who hailed him as he passed.

‘What, you!’ he called out boisterously, obviously pleased to see his victim alive and well. ‘Why, then you came out of it all better than I! They got me two days later—shadowed me after a meeting and snapped me up. Devil take it, I’m glad to see you are recovered! It was that idiot Kavalof’s fault!—he signalled that it was all right. He swears to this day that the light of a lamp fell upon the face of the man in the sledge, and that it was you-know-who. Then you had such a devil of a smart sledge——’

‘*Noo ládno, boodet!* Come, that’s enough,’

said a soldier of the escort, pushing Ivan back into line. 'Pardon, my friend,' he remarked apologetically to Volodia; 'it is forbidden to speak to the convicts.'

'Let him give me a rouble for cigarettes, you devil!' shouted Ivan, whereat the group laughed and the escort joined in. Volodia handed Ivan a few silver coins; he was not at present too well supplied with the sinews of war, his source of revenue being closed on account of strikes.

'Your saint shall have a candle for this,' cried Ivan, pocketing the money. 'If you see Maximilian, my friend——' But here the escort lost his patience, and hustled Zaitzoff roughly to the back of the mob of convicts. Volodia, afraid lest he should bring trouble upon him by remaining within hailing distance, walked off to the farther end of the platform. The gang was presently marched away to a shed, where they were securely locked up until accommodation should be provided by the railway authorities for the continuation of their dismal journey east. Volodia saw no more of his acquaintance.

A week later, making inquiry—in virtue of the special permit he carried—at a penal Rest House some hundreds of miles further

upon his way, he obtained the first news of Matrona.

Her name was hunted up, for a consideration, by a clerk whose duty it was to check at this point of their journey the names of all convicts passing the station. 'The captain of the escort has a copy given to him,' the clerk explained, 'in a sealed envelope, and this is presented to the next checking clerk at Hodinsky, two hundred miles further on, who verifies his new list by the old one. You will eventually find the woman by examining the lists as you go along. She must be a rare one if she is worth all the trouble you are taking.'

Then one day, at a station beyond the Urals, the list of convicts recently checked was shown to him, and in this list Matrona's name was not included.

'How is this?' he asked of the clerk, who took but a languid interest in the inquiry and replied with a yawn—

'For the best of reasons—because the convict you mention did not appear.'

'But is there a penal establishment in which she could have become a permanent prisoner between this and Chelabinsk, where her name was last notified?'

'Certainly not.'

‘Then where is she?’ The clerk laughed.

‘My knowledge is confined to events occurring upon this planet only,’ he replied.

‘Do you mean that she is dead?’

The clerk, with an air of consummate boredom, reached for a file. He detached the copy of the list of convicts forwarded to him from the nearest office westward, glanced at it, and threw it across to Volodia. Pavlof now perceived that in this list several names were marked with a cross.

‘What is it—what does it mean?’ he muttered. A wave of deep emotion passed over his heart. ‘Is the poor girl really dead?—I have her pardon in my pocket—I am her husband——’

‘What, a miscarriage of justice?’ laughed the clerk. ‘You are lucky then, let me tell you, to be free to tell the tale; to hint to authority that authority has blundered is a dangerous game. Devil take it, man, you look as glum as though she were the only woman on this earth! If you wish to know details of the catastrophe, ask for Dubof at the Rest House.’

Volodia escaped quickly from the room, feeling that, if he should remain five minutes longer with this man—another instance of the

degenerating influence of official position in Russia, even the humblest—he must strangle the brute.

From Dubof, at the Rest House, he heard a piteous tale, a story sordid enough, but with the ring of true tragedy.

‘There were three died together,’ said Dubof, ‘at a railway station thirty miles down the line; the escort told me the tale. Devil take it, what a woman will do when she loves! The men and women travel in separate trucks. On arrival at the station of Putilsk it was found that a man whose list-name was Ilinsky, though some called him Harkof, which he had declared in a drunken fit to be his real name—it was found that this man had stabbed another, Vanukof, who was the woman Pavlof’s lover or husband—deuce knows which. On learning of this, the woman broke through the guards in charge of the female convicts, and threw herself upon the murderer Harkof, fastening herself so savagely upon the man’s throat that he was unable to shake her off, and quickly losing control of his temper, caught her, in his turn, by the neck to strangle her. This he would have accomplished in a moment, and realising this the officer in charge ordered his men to fire a volley into the rascal. Well,

one of the bullets killed the woman, who was already as good as strangled—a pretty woman, too, and wildly in love with Vanukof. *Chort Vozmee!* Talk of the grip of the devil upon a man's soul! If he holds on to us as Harkof had gripped the woman's throat we are done for, every one of us.' Dubof laughed aloud. 'Why, they couldn't unfasten his dead fingers, and the two had to be buried together, Vanukof being chucked in with them. Will they continue their fight in the next world, eh? Holy Saints, preserve us all from such things. Deuce take it, it's dry work telling long stories! A rouble? The blessed Saint Vladimir, equal to the Apostles, befriend you. They were buried by a priest in the corner of a village burial-ground, and the convicts subscribed for a *panichida* for their souls! They have hearts, these poor devils!'

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CHAPTER XXXVI

VOLODIA returned to St. Petersburg out of love with all the world. The one thing in it which he desired was not to be had. He was weary of wandering; he was tired of watching the hopeless endeavours of the Russian people to obtain a measure of justice; he was sick to death of the brutalities of official Russia of every grade, from the lowest soldier of the convict-guard to the highest bureaucrat—they were all the same. And the oppressed people—there was no man who could do anything for them. It seemed as though authority, determined to be the fount-head of justice, which should either run dry at will or shed generous waters, obeying no man's behests, was resolved to stifle every voice that should presume to demand reform, ere it would so much as begin to dole out, by degrees, some little concessions to the bitter cry of a nation.

He found a St. Petersburg stunned and breathless with renewed repressions in place of expected reforms, but determined still; a

city whose people were concerned with but one idea, were animated with a single will; a city of men and women absorbed in the determination to secure for themselves that for which the enslaved nation had fought and would fight again; and so absorbed that there was neither time nor the concentration necessary for the usual daily round; students—even school-children (affording the single note of humour in a chorus of tragedy) were on strike; so were their teachers; so were all who could afford to make visible protest against existing things. Trade languished, the daily press was gagged and could do nothing. The paralysis of expected violence was in the air; the reign of bomb terror had begun in Moscow, and people in St. Petersburg seemed to go listening for the sound of explosions. The peasants in the villages—even the ignorant peasants—had begun to demand reforms; thanks to the compelling arguments of agitators, their puzzled brains had realised that something was amiss with their well-being—they knew only the land, therefore a free gift of their neighbours' estates was by them demanded. The vacillating Tsar, driven this way and that by conflicting counsels, issued in the morning a manifesto proclaiming his unbend-

ing determination that Russia should be compelled in the present as in the past to hug the chains of autocracy undiluted; while later in the same day appeared a rescript, addressed to some minister, promising to the people a qualified measure of popular representation; the former document testifying to a visit from Pobiedonostsef, the latter to the protests of some more enlightened adviser, less reactionary or better qualified to read the writing upon the wall. Some said that his Majesty was finessing with his people; that he reserved his concessions for the crucial moment when his discredited soldiers should return from the East, when the necessity to placate the people would become even more urgent than to-day.

Meanwhile, the portrait of the Tsar had been torn down from the walls of many public buildings. The Government was defending its existence, but had no authority in the land excepting that of might. Everything seemed to be at haphazard, without scheme, without looking forward. Whither Russia was tending no man knew. Meanwhile, also, Mukden fell and Tiehling followed suit; Kuropatkin—vanquished and bereft of half his army—was superseded. The Tsar, petulant with ministers whom he accused of concealing from him the

truth, raved that he would continue to mobilise army after army until he should have attained his end. *Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat!*

Was it possible, men asked, that this most unfortunate and unenviable of monarchs, who thus reiterated his unbending determination to carry on the present war until his Imperial will should have been accomplished, was the 'Apostle of Peace'? He had decreed that hundreds and thousands of lives, that millions of pounds of the wealth of his people must still be spent. He did not cry, 'Give back my legions!' but rather 'Take more and more—dissipate them as you will, but gain my end.' Neither would he have peace at home. Of reforms which touch the principle of autocracy he still refused to hear. The Grand Dukes, with the exception of one, were still alive and in possession of the autocratic ear, using their malign influence to retard the enlightenment and development of his afflicted people. The ministers—some cowards and time-servers, a few patriotic—were seldom unanimous. Pobiedonostsef had lost little of his influence over his master. These are the things which went for despair.

Yet there were many, even now, who did

not despair of Russia, though at the moment of Volodia's return it would seem that her affairs were passing through their darkest possible hour.

These sanguine ones contended that, in spite of appearances, there was abroad in the air, everywhere, an indefinable something which breathed both of peace and of hope. The nation was now unanimous that the country and the people should no longer be exploited for the benefit of one man or one caste; public opinion had developed and began to be a power in the land, and that surely made for hope. The Russian people knew themselves to be worthy of better things; they had begun to believe that in the lap of the gods there must surely lie for them, even at that darkest hour, the gift of Justice long withheld.

At present Volodia was not one of these more sanguine ones. He had just returned from a depressing journey, and had found St. Petersburg even more hopeless, as it seemed, than he had left it. If only his Highness would give him immediate employment in the country!

For Volodia pined to be out of it all, to hide himself in the forests among the birds and beasts that he loved to hunt and to watch.

The tension of the position weighed upon him. He would disappear a while; he could do no good here. He would beg the Grand Duke to appoint him now to the promised rangership, and to let it be as far as possible from St. Petersburg and from every town. Maximilian had estates close to the borders of Lake Ladoga, forty miles from the capital; here at least a man might live out of hearing of the cry of the people.

So Volodia presented himself at the palace of his Imperial Highness, going to the side door which was the special charge of his old friend Gregory.

Gregory greeted him with effusive joy. He had not seen him since the day when they had schemed together and Volodia had been driven away into the jaws of the assassin, clad in the fur mantle of his Highness and using the grand ducal sledge.

‘Would you believe it,’ said old Gregory, ‘his Imperial Highness shook hands with me on his return that night—do you follow me? He, cousin of the Tsar, the Grand Duke Maximilian Petrovitch, shook hands with me, Gregory Panof, doorkeeper. He had cursed me freely enough, mind you, and fined me upon discovering that his sledge was not in

waiting, but on his return he shook hands and thanked me, saying that by our scheme we—you and I—had saved his life; he also raised my wages by three roubles a month, and gave me the Household Order of Merit. But, O Lord, how he cursed when he found the sledge was not ready for him—I never saw his Imperial Highness so angry before!’

But Volodia was depressed by reason of the hopeless plight of his beloved country; he left old Gregory wondering at his despondency and hastened into the presence of Maximilian.

The Grand Duke received Volodia very kindly, and to his joy and gratitude an appointment to the very situation he most desired was made at once. There was a *dacha*, a country house, a mere lodge, on his estates near Sheremetiefka, thirty-five miles away. This was a splendid shooting estate, every bird and beast that has a vested interest in Russian forests abounded there; Volodia could occupy the lodge, shoot game for the grand ducal court, attend to the rearing of English pheasants and partridges which his Highness was at pains to introduce into his preserves, and receive for his services the modest salary of one hundred roubles per month. Volodia closed at once with the offer.

‘By the bye, was it not you who were interested in the young woman Nathalie Oodine?’ said the Grand Duke, as Volodia was about to terminate the interview. The younger man started—what was his Highness going to tell him? Interested in her!

‘Highness, she is my best and dearest friend,’ he replied flushing. ‘Is all well with her?’

‘So far as I know; I am no longer concerned in that question. If you would know more of her, here is her address, sent to me but a few days since by the French maid Lizette—perhaps you may remember the girl? Her mistress, it seems, offended her, whereupon she revealed to me Nathalie’s address, which Nathalie, for reasons of her own, had desired to keep secret. As far as I am concerned, the revelation has come too late. I remember that you once asked me, as a favour, to withdraw my protection from the lady. At that time I found it impossible to oblige you, but a month has done wonders in proving to me that I can do without her. If you should see her, convey to Nathalie my most distinguished respects. Take the letter if the address is of value to you. . . .’

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN evening in late March, a perfect, peaceful evening in mid-forest. Far away in the distance was just audible the sound of the murmuring of waters, for the spring god had come into his own, and a thousand streams were rejoicing in their new-found freedom and throwing themselves, in the exuberance of their delight, upon the bosom of Ladoga, upon whose broad breast still lay the mark of captivity which had endured the winter long.

‘Away with you—away with you!’ cried the joyous waters, ‘crash, smash, sink, thaw, and away with you, ice! We are free, we are free, and your reign is over!’

Old father Neva was open too, and busily carried away upon his broad back all the loose pieces of Ladoga ice that the little streams could loosen and detach. Between them they would, at no distant day, set the great lake free from bondage.

It was eight o’clock and marvellously still

and fine. The cold nights of early spring were over now, and there was scarcely a suspicion of frost in the air. The snow, in open places, had withered before the fervid scorn of the spring god, and the land lay revealed, brown and dazed and soppy, waiting for the spirit of life to move within her womb. Even the hidden drifts in the heart of the forest grew daily thin and wizened, for the eye of the god had detected them and their day was done.

There was scarcely breeze enough to move the slender tops of the pine-trees, which had long since shaken themselves free from the thralldom of their snow burdens, patiently borne throughout the winter months. All nature seemed to be waiting to-night in hushed expectancy, as though the joy of its emancipation was as yet but half realised. Would the warm days, the balmy nights of summer really come again? Would flowers bloom in the desolate places, and grasses wave? Would soft winds woo once more the whispering tree tops, and little birds return to the forest, and the sun shine gloriously all the day? A great hope had set its blessed mark upon the land and all things lay a-waiting for the joy that might come, *must* come.

The evening was too young for the spring sounds which would presently enliven the forest. Within a couple of hours many old stagers of the woods and marshes would lift up their voices in their evening love-exercises—a kind of rehearsal, these, for the great Dawn-Concert which is performed daily in these latitudes. That old rascal the black-cock, worst of husbands but most splendid of lovers, would shortly come forth and issue his hectoring challenges to his peers. So would old Don Juan the capercailzie, as deficient in the domestic virtues as his smaller brother; he, too, would appear; he would take up a commanding position upon the top of some pine or birch tree and practice a few staves of his love-song before falling asleep to gather strength for the challenging, the wooing, and, perhaps, the actual blood-shedding of the morning *tok*.

Soon the wood-cock, too, would begin to fly, croaking from point to point, for each game bird has his own method of love-making. The snipe would dart, bleating like a sheep, high above the tree-tops, describing wonderful circles and other marvels of winged agility for the admiration of his lady-love. The frogs would set the air throbbing with their monotonous

incantations down in the marsh, and the cranes would scream night-long. Perhaps in the distance a wolf would ease his love-lorn soul with a dismal howl or two. The little field mice would come shyly out and chase one another and disappear. The willow-grouse would laugh and laugh, and sleep and laugh again, darting hither and thither after the queen of his merry heart—a good lover he and the faithful husband of one wife, a professor of the higher moralities—very unlike old Don Juan there, or the jolly debonair old Sir Launcelot Blackcock, who takes his pleasures where he finds them. For the willow-grouse is a good father as well as husband; he will see his beautiful little white and golden spouse through her nesting and hatching troubles; he will help her to hatch and to rear her nestful of bantlings, and will personally conduct them through the perils of their first year of life.

A man and woman stood hand in hand and waited. They stood in a clearing of the forest and listened and occasionally whispered. Volodia's gun rested against a pine-tree at his side; Nathalie leaned upon him and watched his face as a devotee might watch adoringly the image of her patron

saint. 'It is heaven!' she whispered. 'Since the day when you bridged the gulf of shame which divided us, my Volodia, I have——'

'Hush!' he whispered; 'you are not to talk; moreover, you speak of a forbidden subject.' He laughed and kissed her. 'You really mustn't talk,' he added, 'for the woodcock is the shyest of birds.'

'But I am so happy, I *must* speak——'

'Hush! Listen!'

A sound came from far away, so low, so faint, that it seemed to Nathalie more like the stuff dreams are made of than the utterance of some live thing that approached.

'What is it?' she whispered.

'A woodcock; you will see in a moment. Listen!'

Gradually the sound formulated itself. A soft whistle, a gentle croak; a croak and again a plaintive whistle; the note of the amorous woodcock.

A moment later, and through the dusk of mid-air came gliding a presence. Volodia raised his gun——

'No, no, Volodia, don't shoot!' she whispered. 'Not this one—for my sake!'

Volodia dropped his weapon with a low

laugh. The ghost-like bird flew on his way, croaking and whistling, intent upon the instincts of spring-time, the joys of existence; over the pine-trees he glided; he was and then he was not—he had disappeared.

‘Silly little woman; why was I made to spare him?’ Volodia asked, with a laugh.

Nathalie’s eyes were full of tears. ‘It is spring—he is so happy—perhaps his mate awaits him. Besides, do you not know that each bird that is caged and is released at Easter is a sin forgiven to us? Who knows, that bird’s life may—Volodia, you are laughing—am I silly? Do not shoot to-night; let the birds live this one night for my sake! We will not go home yet a while, but we will stand and watch and listen; it is the spring for us, my soul, as well as for them!’

Volodia laughed. ‘Have your way, then,’ he said, ‘if you must; you have at least seen a woodcock-*tiaga*, and in this you are peculiar among women. For your sake I will be sentimental for once. I to be sentimental over the shooting of game-birds! and I to be married to a wife who would spare lives! Why, we must think of the cooking-pot, my soul; there are no butchers’ shops in our forest home!’

‘It is only this once,’ she said: ‘this shall be

my night of nights ; I am nearer to heaven than ever before. Volodia, I think God is not far away from us to-night ; this silence of the forest is His voice ; or is it the Te Deum that the soul of Nature raises to His glory, we with her ? It would pain me to see life taken to-night.'

'Then we will watch and listen,' he replied good-naturedly. 'Are you cold ? Lean against me, and I against the tree—do you hear the murmur of waters ? That is the Dubofka running into the lake close to the mouth of the river ; we are but a mile away here.'

'To me it is like the subdued voice of the Russian people,' she murmured ; 'the people who have suffered long and silently, but who have found a tongue, and will never be silent again until the goal is reached ; the great, wide, generous, brimming sea of Liberty. There is still trouble between them and their desires—much ice, many rapids, immeasurable obstacles—but these waters will one day find the sea, and the Russian people will one day find justice.'

'Who will give it to them ? Will The Man appear who shall prove himself a stronger than Autocracy ? What can the people do with none to lead them ? Sheep without a shep-

herd—bodies without brains—I think the Tsar will give them nothing until that man arises who will compel him to do justice—“when justice is set aside, what is monarchy better than brigandage?”’

But Nathalie would not be denied. ‘To-night I am happy and sanguine, my soul; let me dream my dream. Russia has spoken; when a nation speaks it is the voice of God. Surely, surely, the Tsar will not for ever close his ears.’

‘What is the Tsar to us, here? Let us forget him a while, or only pray that the gods may give him sanity; that they may give sight to his eyes, and hearing to his ears before it is too late. You and I will forget such things; we have gone aside for a space out of the din of battle—St. Petersburg is a million miles away from us here; let us forget it a while also. The murmuring of the fighting waters is not an unpleasant sound when heard from a mile away, but close at hand it grows deafening.’

‘The nation is in travail, but by suffering it will bring forth the child Peace. Spring is here and hope; one day things will be better—are you not sure of it?’

‘I am sure that you and I are happy. When

God wills—or the Tsar permits!—Russia will be happy also, but her happiness is a long time coming.’

A capercailzie, scarcely a hundred yards away, raised its insignificant voice in a challenge; another, farther distant, replied. Volodia seized his gun, his face flushing with the ardour of the sportsman. Nathalie laid her hand upon his arm.

‘Not to-night,’ she whispered; ‘you promised.’

Volodia laughed and set the gun down, and they stood still to listen. From the open space a quarter of a mile away came the sudden ‘Chu-wish!’ of a black-cock knight—then another and another. A snipe whirled somewhere overhead in the darkness, baa-ing like a sheep. A crane screamed from the marshes by the Neva banks, and from somewhere in the depths of the forest, far away, a wolf howled dismally.

A soft breeze sprang up, stirring the tree tops; it seemed to whisper ‘Awake and deck your heads with new green! Your lover is here!’

And ever in the intervals of silence came the murmur of the waters which had known bondage, crying ‘We are free! we are free

lakes, rivers, streamlets, awake and move—
winter is past! summer will come one day!
After many rains and much tumult it will
come at last; the night is nearly over, the
day is coming—it is coming!’

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